

At a meeting of the SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 16TH NOVEMBER, 2010 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 19th October, 2010

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19th October, 2010 be confirmed as a correct record subject to 'small sale' on page 4, paragraph 2 being amended to read 'small scale'.

Declarations of Interest

Item 5 – History and Heritage Update

Councillor Errington declared a personal interest in the item as a family member was in ownership of a listed building.

Item 7 – Progress Report on National Indicator 188 – Adopting to Weather Impacts and Climate Change

Councillor Rolph declared a personal interest as a Council appointed member of the Regional Environment Protection Advisory Committee (REPAC) and as her husband was a member of the Durham Wildlife Trust.

Change in the Order of Business

It was agreed that Item 5 on the Agenda (History and Heritage Update – Policy Review) be considered at this juncture to allow the two housing items on the agenda to be considered consecutively.

History and Heritage Update – Policy Review

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated Members on the work ongoing within the Culture and Tourism service with regard to the Heritage offer across the City and to provide evidence for the review the Committee was undertaking in relation to Culture supporting Sustainable Communities.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Vicky Medhurst, Principal Librarian, presented the report which provided the Committee with an overview and update in relation to the following initiatives:-

- i) Heritage Open Days 2010;
- ii) Local Studies;
- iii) Fulwell Windmill;
- iv) Sunderland Heritage Forum;
- v) History Fair 2010;
- vi) Heritage Events;
- vii) Bowes Railway
- viii) Priorities on an area basis;
- ix) the Wearmouth-Jarrow World Heritage bid Status.

Councillor McClennan referred to the Bangladeshi and Polish communities that had become established in Sunderland. She stated that it was important that their stories were recorded before they were lost as the communities gradually became part of the indigenous population.

Councillor Rolph commended Ms. Medhurst on the report and stated that the list of cultural activities was so large it would have been difficult making a decision regarding what to include. She would, however, have liked to see some information regarding the presentation/conservation of the City's heritage together with information as to any cultural initiatives being undertaken by the voluntary/community sector.

Councillor Rolph further enquired whether the Council maintained an audit with regard to what it considered to be its heritage assets i.e. what they are, where they are and how they are managed.

With regard to the conservation of heritage and voluntary sector initiatives, Ms. Medhurst advised that she would try to ensure these were referenced in future reports. She stated that she was not aware that the Council maintain an audit as described by Councillor Rolph. It was a job that needed to be done. She was aware

that an exercise in this regard was being undertaken in the Coalfield area and that she believed that most of the information was available and it just needed to be drawn together into one source.

Councillor Foster advised that a similar audit was being undertaken in the North area. It was a massive and seemingly endless task which required help from volunteers in the area.

There being no further questions or comments for Ms. Medhurst the Chairman thanked her for her report and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the report be received and noted; and
- ii) it be noted that updates regarding heritage in Sunderland, including the Built Heritage and Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, would be the subject of separate reports to future meetings of the Committee.

Sunderland Housing Priorities

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) appending a joint report of the Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services and Deputy Chief Executive on the development of the Sunderland Housing Priorities Plan (HPP) which was approved by Cabinet at its meeting held on 3rd November, 2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Alan Caddick, Head of Housing, presented the report informing Members that the Sunderland Housing Priorities Plan was seen as the main product of the ongoing dialogue between the City Council and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and was intended to form the basis for future investment decision-making between the Council and the Agency over the next 15 years. The plan would compliment the Economic Masterplan and ensure that Sunderland's housing offer would meet the City's needs and objectives.

The Council would be the strategic lead in the delivery of the plan. It was likely that the 'Local Investment Agreement' between the Council and the HCA would be signed off early in 2011 and this would be brought before the Committee for discussion.

Members were advised that being a 15 year plan it would be developed in a staged process. The first 3 year segment of the plan would be developed between now and March 2011. Mr. Caddick assured Members that there would be full engagement with the Committee as to how the plan was taken forward.

Councillor Errington referred to the proposed development at Chapel Garth and asked if a percentage of the housing would be social housing. Mr. Caddick replied that in his opinion it would not. The site was of high value and there was a potential

for the receipt to be utilised elsewhere. Councillor Errington requested whether provision of a new school would be considered if the development went ahead. Mr. Caddick replied that this linked into the place agenda for the City Village aspect of the Economic Master Plan. There was a need to look at the environment as a whole and not just housing in isolation.

Councillor McClennan referred to the following priority as detailed on page 23 of the agenda: 'Providing more appropriate accommodation for homeless people, including tackling the high concentration of hostel accommodation in the Sunnyside area.'

She stated that she would like Mr. Caddick to submit a report on the level of hostel provision in the City including an assessment of the growing support industry surrounding hostels and the effect of this on the environs. Mr. Caddick advised that his service was currently developing a Hostel Strategy. It was true that there was a disproportionate spread of hostels across the City together with various safeguarding issues that needed to be addressed. It was a huge issue requiring a short, mid and long term plan. There was a need to involve hostel owners in the planning process, however, ultimately they may need to be told that they were not wanted. 60% of the people living in the City's hostels such as Camerex House, Tatham House and the Norfolk Hotel were not from Sunderland. There was a need to speak to local authorities and other agencies such as the Probation Service to stop them making referrals to these hostels.

Councillor Kay referred to the plan and highlighted that there was a great deal that was still fluid and unknown with regard to the City's economic aspirations. He was pleased that Land Securities were making positive noises regarding The Bridges and hoped that the Vaux site would become a massive driver together with the housing planned for the old Cornings and Groves sites. He asked what Mr. Caddick felt were the biggest risks to the City's aspirations. Mr. Caddick stated that not surprisingly it centred on funding and investment. The Council had the foresight to develop Council mortgages which could be used to help support people. The Council would look at various initiatives with regard to its land assets and would reiterate the message that Sunderland was open for business.

Councillor Rolph stated that she was pleased the Council was taking the strategic lead with regard to Housing as that improved the chances of prioritising social housing. She noted, however, the use of the term 'where appropriate' within the plan. She advised that of the 359 homes built as part of the Lambton Cokeworks reclamation only 14 were eventually built for the social market. She recognised the Council's commitment to the issue but believed that nationally the balance was being tipped against social housing.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Dixon Mr. Caddick advised that nothing had eventually transpired regarding the development of the local housing company as the model being proposed had been flawed. The preparatory work had not gone to waste however, as 5 sites in Sunderland had been identified through this work.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Dixon regarding the reference to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities', Mr. Caddick clarified that this referred to the fact that properties provided by developers did not always meet the cultural

needs of some communities, for example in terms of size and the number of bathrooms.

The Chairman referred to the Comprehensive Spending Review and the pressure it may place on mortgage rescue schemes at a time when demand was likely to increase. Mr. Caddick advised that his service was currently reviewing how it approached its communications to make people aware of such schemes as currently it tended to be via notice on the Council's website or through word of mouth.

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

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Housing and Neighbourhood Renewal Enforcement Policy and Update for Selective Licensing Scheme, Middle Hendon

The Executive Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with:-

- i) a copy of the Housing and Neighbourhood Renewal Enforcement Policy; and
- ii) an updated position statement in relation to the Selective Licensing/ Neighbourhood Management Scheme, introduced in the middle Hendon area in partnership between the Council and Back on the Map New Deal for Communities which had become operational on 1st July, 2010.

Councillor McClennan congratulated Mr. Caddick and his team in over achieving in respect of the targets set and in keeping the residents engaged with the process. She noted, however, that there was a short term risk of an increase in empty properties. Mr. Caddick advised that he would concentrate on those empty properties which through neglect were becoming a blight on those around them.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Kay, Mr. Caddick stated that he believed that the effectiveness of ASBOs had become corrupted because they were generally being used as a first port of call rather than as a last resort. He believed that they were still a valuable tool but the whole approach to anti social behaviour was being reviewed in order to work more intelligently at a local level with regard to the setting of core standards and enforcement. Early intervention was the key to stop ASBOs being issued in the first place.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Dixon regarding the attitude of private landlords to the scheme, Mr. Caddick advised that it was somewhat of a Curate's Egg – good in parts. Initially there had been a lot of hostility, however, once it had become law, the mandatory nature had encouraged a lot of private landlords to become involved. This had been reflected in the increase in the membership of the Accredited Landlords Scheme. There had also been a feeling among some of

the better landlords that the Licensing Scheme had been punitive as all landlords had been treated the same.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Rolph, Mr. Caddick confirmed that there were different regulations pertaining to Inspections of registered Social Landlords and that the Council's inspection regime would focus on private landlords.

Councillor Rolph added that the Policy was a really useful one for Members and asked if Members could receive regular reports on enforcement action either to this Committee or to the Area Committees.

Mr. Caddick confirmed that it was fine having a policy in place, however, it was important to demonstrate how it had been used. He stated that he could submit a report to this Committee at the end of each financial year and ensure that it was outcome focussed.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Caddick for what he believed to be a fantastic report and looked forward to receiving the update.

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Progress Report on National Indicator 188 – Adapting to Weather Impacts and Climate Change

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) in respect of the above which completed a suite of reports presented to inform and update the Committee on work being undertaken in relation to tackling climate change.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Neil Cole, Manager, Planning Policy, presented the report highlighting:-

- the background to tackling climate change;
- the Council's performance in adapting to climate change;
- climate risks to the natural environment;
- weather and climate risks to Council services;
- flooding risks
- the next steps.

Councillor Rolph referred to the positive aspects of Sunderland's climate and asked if these had been used to market the City as a good place to do business. Mr. Cole replied that in fairness it probably had not. There was, however, no reason that they could not in the future.

Mr. Cole having discussed the process of flood risk assessments, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st November, 2010 – 28th 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 1st November, 2010 – 28th February, 2011 which related to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members requested that the following items be referred to the Committee for consideration:-

- i) the Accredited Landlords Scheme (December 2010);
- ii) Low Carbon Homes Strategy (January 2011);
- iii) Financial Assistance Policy (February 2011).

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.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Rolph having requested that the enforcement of the selective licensing scheme and the Housing Neighbourhood Renewal Policy be included in the Work Programme, Mr. Diamond advised that this could be included in April's performance report.

Councillor Errington requested that the Council's policy with regard to the Aquatic Centre be included in the Annual Sport and Leisure Report.

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

Urgent Item

In accordance with Section 100(B) of the Local Government Act 1972 the Chairman stated that the following item was to be considered at this meeting as a matter of urgent business as the Conference it related to was to be held prior to the next meeting of the Committee.

North East Fuel Poverty Forum

The Chairman advised that a free conference organised by the North East Fuel Poverty Forum was to be held in Benton on Tuesday, 14th December, 2010 from 9.30 am to 12.30 pm. She informed Members that any expressions of interest should be submitted to Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer.

8. RESOLVED that approval be given for Members of the Committee to attend the North East Fuel Poverty Forum Conference to be held in Benton on Tuesday, 14th December, 2010.

(Signed) S. WATSON,
Chairman.