

At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENT AND ATTRACTIVE CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on MONDAY, 14TH MARCH, 2011 at 6.00 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Councillors Ball, E. Gibson, Kelly, Tye, Wood and A. Wright

Also Present:-

Councillor Tate - Chair of Management Scrutiny Committee

Councillor D. Wilson - Portfolio Holder for Safer City and Culture

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Padgett, Wakefield and L. Walton.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee held on 14th February, 2011

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 14th February, 2011 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Sunderland 'the Place' Policy Review 2010/11: Contribution from the Portfolio Holder for Safer City and Culture

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Safer City and Culture, Councillor D. Wilson, at the meeting to make a contribution to the Committee's Policy Review for 2010/11 into Sunderland 'the Place'.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

The Chairman welcomed Councillor D. Wilson to the meeting.

Councillor D. Wilson commented that the Draft Policy Review Final Report was an excellent piece of work. He stated that there were a number of high earners across all sectors, such as footballers who worked in the city however very few of them actually lived within the city. There was a requirement to create a city where these people would want to live so that they spend their earnings within the city; there was a need to attract the designer shops and top class restaurants that high earners would want.

While it was excellent that the city had the lowest Council Tax in the region it could be a good move to increase the Council Tax to increase the amount that the Council could spend on improving the city for the benefit of residents. It was expected that the Take That concert could bring in up to £18million; there was a need to invest some money in improving the appearance of the city for the tourists and media visitors who would be coming to the city for the concerts.

A ferry crossing the river would help to link the East End to Roker and would help with providing links to the heritage sites in the East End which would increase the number of visitors to the East End; it would also help to attract people to Sunnyside as they would be likely to pass through on their way to the ferry. There would also be a link from the city centre to the glass centre and the beach which would help to increase visitor numbers. Nexus had undertaken a survey which had shown that there would be expected passenger numbers of up to 1300 per day if a ferry was introduced and the operators of the port had said that if pontoons were built then they would be able to find the boats to fill them.

There was a Heritage Lottery Bid in place to provide funding for Hylton Castle and it was important that signage was installed to inform people of how to get to the castle; other cities with castles had advertising to attract tourists to the castle even if it was just a ruin.

There was a need for the Area Committees to provide support for culture within the city, an example of this was Exhibition Park in Seaburn which had previously hosted the historic bus show however the organisers were reluctant to return until repairs and improvements had been made to the access onto the show ground; this was something which the Area Committee could look at as a small outlay could result in increased tourism into the area.

The twin resorts of Roker and Seaburn were one of the biggest assets the city had and were one of the assets which residents were most proud of. There was a need to improve the image of the city to attract people to the beaches and this would then result in the resort area being further improved. There was not a fair at Seaburn any more because despite the fairground being an excellent location it was not economically viable to operate a fair from the location due to the relatively small number of visitors.

Perceptions of the city needed to be improved; people from outside of the region did not know about the city's heritage or that the city had such excellent beaches, people perceived the city to be an industrial town rather than a tourist destination.

Councillor Wood agreed that Hylton Castle was an asset to the city and more should be done to promote it. He did not feel that a ferry would be necessary, especially with the spending cuts required of the Council; if there was to be money spent on transport he felt that improvements to the bus network would be more appropriate. He also queried what was happening with Holy Trinity Church as this was important to the East End Heritage however nothing seemed to be happening to improve the church.

Councillor D. Wilson advised that he had attended a meeting with the church trust; the potential projects were being examined to see which would be most viable.

Councillor Tye commented that in his opinion the Council Tax in Sunderland was the lowest in the region due to the Council having the best Members and officers in the region. There was a need for private sector investment in the resort areas of Roker and Seaburn and it was important to consider that Roker and Seaburn were in a stronger position than some resorts; many of the traditional resorts which had historic piers were in decline and the piers were decaying.

Councillor Kelly commented that the public wanted the Council to be able to provide everything however they also wanted the lowest Council Tax bills possible. There was a need for the Council to work closely with the private sector to maximise the amount of improvements which could be carried out. A ferry on the river would need investment from private investors and it would be important to examine how a ferry service could help with the regeneration of the sea front. Partnership working between Sunderland and South Tyneside Councils could help with the regeneration of the sea front and increasing tourism. Sunderland needed to advertise itself as a tourist destination as unlike places such as Whitby the city was not an established tourist destination. He agreed with Councillor D. Wilson's comments that there was a need to make people more aware of the city's heritage.

Both Councillors Kelly and Tye felt that the Area Committees would be the ideal forum for discussing these issues and allocating funds for improvement works.

Councillor A. Wright commented that there needed to be improved signage for Hylton Castle and the University. Sunnyside had seen significant expenditure and was an excellent area of the city centre however it was underused; the ferry, if viable, would help to bring people into Sunnyside as they travelled to and from the ferry. Resorts such as Whitby relied on their reputation as tourist destinations to attract visitors, Sunderland would have to work to develop a selling point to attract tourists as the city was not historically a tourist destination; there was a need to invest in advertising campaigns such as the

previous 'Nice one Sunderland' to show potential visitors what Sunderland had to offer.

Councillor E. Gibson commented that there was a need for more executive housing in the city and the resorts of Roker and Seaburn were excellent however there was a lack of quality hotel provision to provide accommodation for tourists.

Councillor D. Wilson stated that he had received an award and the visitors to the city as part of this award had been housed in the Marriot Hotel in Seaburn and they had been delighted by the fresh air and the glass centre. The visitors had said that they wished there was more provision of holiday apartments in the city.

With regard to a ferry across the river the Chairman stated that he had recently been to Southampton and while there he had been on a 'chain ferry' which was operated by chains running along the river bed. These ferries were cheap to run when compared with other types of ferry and could be worth investigating if it was felt that a ferry would be worthwhile. He felt that a ferry would help with the regeneration of the riverside.

The Chairman also stated that Sunderland was a better city than people thought and there was a need to market the city more to encourage more people to move to the city or visit.

Councillor Kelly added that there had been Christmas Lights in Washington which had been a small investment but had resulted in a lot of positive feedback. He felt however that the Council was paying for shops to make more of a profit and he thought that it could be worthwhile speaking to businesses to try to get them to contribute to the cost of installing Christmas lights.

Councillor D. Wilson commented that last Christmas there had been the lights in Mowbray Park and there had been record breaking sales in the shops while in other cities sales had been poor; he felt that it was likely that the increase in spending was due to people coming into the city centre to visit Mowbray Park. It was hoped that there would be even more to attract people to the city next year.

In response to a question from the Chairman, Councillor D. Wilson advised that he felt that there was a need for Portfolio Holders to attend Scrutiny Committees more often as this would allow both the Portfolio Holder and the Scrutiny Committee to be more aware of what each other was doing and also would enable the sharing of ideas.

The Chairman then thanked Councillor D. Wilson for attending the committee and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the discussion be noted as part of the policy review for 2010/11 into Sunderland 'the Place'.

Sunderland 'the Place' Policy Review 2010/11: Draft Final Report

The Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee submitted a report (copy circulated) which detailed the work of the Committee into the Policy Review for 2010/11 into Sunderland 'the Place'.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Helen Lancaster, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report and advised Members of the amended version of the report which had been circulated following consultation with the Chairman. Ms Lancaster drew Members attention to the changes within the report.

The Chairman stated that Councillor Wakefield had spoken to him with concerns over the Low Carbon City Villages; he had taken Councillor Wakefield's concerns on board however as Councillor Wakefield's concerns had differed from the views expressed by the Area Committees, Community Spirit Groups and other members of the Committee he did not think it was appropriate for the report to be changed and he had explained this to Councillor Wakefield.

Councillor Tye commented that he felt that the whole exercise had been worthwhile. He sat on the National Health and Safety Sub Committee and he had persuaded it to hold its annual meeting in Sunderland this year which would bring hundreds of people into the city from all over the country.

The Chairman commented that Councillors were some of the best sales people for the city and they needed to make use of their position to sell the city. He also stated that residents often talked the city down while there was a lot to offer within the city; there was a need to change people's attitudes towards the city.

Councillor A. Wright commented that he was very pleased by the report which highlighted a lot of positive aspects of the city. He felt that there was a need for vision for the future.

The Chairman stated that there was a need to engage with local residents and there was a need for local Councillors to inform Cabinet Members of work that needed to be done.

Councillor Kelly commented that when the editor of the Sunderland Echo had addressed the Committee he had advised that the paper was a good medium for promoting the city; there was a need for Members to provide good news stories to the Echo which could be used for promotion of the city. The Christmas lights in Washington had been a small expenditure however they had made residents happier and had increased spending in the local shops.

The Chairman thanked Ms Lancaster for her report and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the draft final report for the 2010/11 policy review into Sunderland 'the Place' be received and noted.

Draft Annual Report of the Committee

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which requested Members approval of the Scrutiny Committee report which would be incorporated into the Annual Report 2010/11 which would be presented to Council.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Helen Lancaster, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report and advised that the report would be forwarded to Management Scrutiny Committee on 14th April, 2011 before being incorporated into the Annual Scrutiny Report which would be submitted to Council.

4. RESOLVED that the annual report be received and noted and be submitted to Management Scrutiny Committee on 14th April, 2011.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 March 2011 – 30 June 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 March 2011 – 30 June 2011 which related to the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Sarah Abernethy, Acting Assistant Scrutiny Officer, presented the Forward Plan.

The Chairman having thanked Ms. Abernethy for her report it was:

5. 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).

Sarah Abernethy, Assistant Acting Scrutiny Officer, presented the work programme.

The Chairman commented that there had been a huge amount of work carried out by the Committee over the year. He thanked Members for all of their hard work over the course of the year and stated that he felt that spreading the workload over the course of the year had helped the Committee to achieve more.

6. 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.