

At a meeting of the ECONOMIC PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CITY HALL on TUESDAY 9TH APRIL 2024 at 4.30 p.m.

Present: -

Councillor Burrell in the Chair

Councillors Dixon, Fagan, Foster, Guy, Leonard, Mordey and Scanlan.

Also in attendance: -

James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

Paul Wood, Principal Democratic Services Officer, Sunderland City Council

Graham Carr, Asset and Network Manager, Sunderland City Council

Tim Smith, Group Engineer, Sunderland City Council

Neil Guthrie, Development Director, Sunderland City Council

Members of the Press

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor Watson

Minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Committee held on 5th March, 2024

A copy of the minutes of the last ordinary meeting held on 5th March 2024 were submitted.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting held on 5th March 2024 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest.

Highways Maintenance Update 2024/2025

The Executive Director of City Development submitted a report (copy circulated) to update the Committee on progress with regards to the planned Highway Maintenance (including Bridges) and Integrated Transport Capital Programme for 2024-2025.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Graham Carr, Asset and Network Manager and Tim Smith, Group Engineer were in attendance to present the report and to answer any Member queries.

In response to Councillor Mordey's enquiry, Mr Carr advised that they were spending more money on residential roads and that he would obtain the figures on the split and get back to Members.

Councillor Mordey commented that he had received requests from disabled residents requiring dropped kerbs for wheelchairs etc and queried if the Council could look at a programme for this. Mr Carr advised that they could look at a programme and historically they had considered this upon individual request when they arose as it was an expensive installation, but if Members had specific areas they wished to be considered then to get in touch and he would look at this further.

Councillor Mordey referred to the issue of large amounts of previous years highways maintenance programme carrying over into the current year and enquired as to the amount of this years that would carry over into next years. Mr Carr confirmed that there had been an awful lot carried over into this year and they had brought this down to around 30 to carry over into next years so it had been reduced by a great deal and they were starting to see progress.

Councillor Fagan referred to the poor quality of resurfacing works when contractors were brought in for a particular road within her ward which had begun to break down almost immediately and queried how this could be allowed to happen and ultimately become the Council's liability after the 12 month guarantee expired.

Mr Carr advised that the surface being referenced would have been micro asphalt and was used in a number of areas and it relies upon the traffic generated pushing the chippings into the ground and that area in particular didn't get the required traffic. Mr Carr advised that they would be going in early this year to implement a more traditional surfacing.

Councillor Leonard enquired as to when any resurfacing was to happen, if cycle lanes that were planned would be incorporated into their works. Mr Carr advised that they do liaise with Officers on those schemes but generally the highways schemes tend to be residential streets so there wouldn't be any cycle lanes due on those.

In response to Councillor Dixons query over any coordination between Officers and City Fibre when digging up roads, Mr Carr informed that they have regular dialogue with them and they now relied upon permits to allow to dig and they could put conditions upon those permits.

Mr Carr also informed that they hold quarterly coordination meetings with utility companies however they are allowed to go in if there's an emergency or a new supply required.

In response to Councillor Dixon's query over the 12 month guarantee on surfacing works, Mr Carr advised that this was the national standard and they were unable to change this, with no negotiations ongoing. If the surfacing failed within those 12 months they did get the contractors back out to replace it.

Councillor Dixon referred to the suggestion of a dropped kerb programme and if there could be something similar in relation to white lines or would it also be that the Councillors should put forward their requests based on when need arose. Mr Carr

informed that there was some funding within the capital programme around the main routes for zebra crossing etc but if Members had any requests then to get in touch.

Councillor Dixon also referred to Councillor Mordey's queries on the carry over from previous years and commented that it showed how much work Officers had done in being able to bring those figures down now as it was mainly back lanes that were being focussed upon so he wished to thank the Officers for their efforts.

Councillor Dixon referred to Arqyle Square commenting that this was a disastrous road but as it was private, queried if there was any enforcement that could be done to get the landlords to rectify this. Mr Carr informed that there had to be an immediate danger identified in order to activate enforcement and they could serve notice but as it was a private street it was the residents who were responsible.

In response to Councillor Fosters enquiry over the prefabricated speed humps being used in South Shields and North Tyneside, Mr Carr advised that he believed they will be using these this year as they helped keep the road surface in place.

The Chairman enquired if Highways received any funding from section 106 monies when new housing developments were built and required new roads. Mr Carr advised that they did not but they did try to hold off on their works until developments were completed on estates and it was a very fine balance.

There being no further questions, The Chairman thanked Mr Carr and Mr Smith for their attendance. it was then:-

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Siglion – Progress Report

The Executive Director of City Development submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide an update on the progress being made by Siglion in delivering the regeneration of a number of key sites within the city.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Neil Guthrie, Development Director was in attendance to present the report along with a PowerPoint presentation and to answer any Members queries.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Dixon on any updates in relation to the residential contractors for Vaux and Sheepfolds housing proposals, Mr Guthrie advised that they were still working on negotiations and dialogue with contractors on the Vaux site and they were looking to launch a call for Contractors at the Sheepfolds.

Councillor Dixon referred to the working group that had considered the Sunnyside area and enquired how Officers felt about the area now, if they held optimism or more concerns. Mr Guthrie commented that there was more optimism and positive feedback with the new operator due to bring the Cinema back and there was also interest around the Frankie and Benny units. They were also seeing a lot of interest from the student community.

Mr Guthrie added that there were still some challenges and they needed to work with the existing operators around the quality of the offer but there were definitely more positives.

Councillor Dixon queried the demand for office space and if there were any concerns about the trend for working from home, post Covid. Mr Guthrie advised that they were not worried as the building such as the Beam and City Hall were well occupied. The market was quite slow as businesses were still trying to understand their models post Covid but there was a trend of businesses wanting to locate nearer open spaces and retail.

Mr Guthrie added that they needed to ensure they got the right people into the right spaces and that these were also sustainable businesses that would be there for considerable periods of time.

In response to Councillor Leonards query over the Bridges space and if there was any change to the circumstances of the parts they wished to acquire, Mr Guthrie advised that the Bridges owners were in dialogue with a potential purchaser and they were not in those particular conversations but once they knew who the new owner would be then they would open up a dialogue.

Councillor Leonard referred to the old travel lodge building on Sunnyside and queried if there had been any change on this. Mr Guthrie commented that like many people, they had acknowledged an interest in the building but it was very much in the owners hands as to what they did with it. It had an opportunity as a key building on the High Street and it shouldn't be left empty.

Councillor Scanlan wished to comment that what Members had heard and been shown via presentation had been great, particularly the works around Sheepfolds and Seaburn and felt that all Councillors should receive this presentation and also suggested that the Portfolio Holder provide regular reports to Members so that they could cascade and promote the good work that's being done to their constituents.

Mr Guthrie commented that they were definitely seeing the tide turn and an increased pride in the area.

There being no further questions the Chairman thanked Mr Guthrie for his attendance and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted

Annual Report 2023/2024

The Scrutiny and Members Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) to seek the Committees approval of the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny report as part of the overall Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24 that was to be presented to Council

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer presented the report and requested Members comments or suggestions.

Councillor Dixon suggested that a mention be made on the work of Catherine Auld who had attended the Committee on three separate occasions over the course of the year. Mr Diamond advised that he would amend the report to reflect this.

4. RESOLVED that Members approved the Economic prosperity Scrutiny Committee report for inclusion in the Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24.

Annual Work Programme 2023-24

The Scrutiny and Members Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated), which set out the current work programme for the Committee for the municipal year 2023/24.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer presented the report for Member's information and possible discussion.

5. RESOLVED that the Committee received and noted the report

Notice of Key Decisions

The Scrutiny and Members Support Co-ordinator submitted a report providing Members with an opportunity to consider the items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28-day period from 14th February, 2024 (copies circulated).

(For copy report and notice – see original minutes).

Mr Diamond reminded Members to get in touch if they required further information on any of the items included in the notice.

6. RESOLVED that the Notice of Key Decisions be received and noted.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) M. BURRELL,
Chairman.