

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

Present:-

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Councillors E. Gibson, Howe, Kelly, Tye, Wakefield, Whalen and Wood

Also Present:-

Councillor Tate, Chair of Management Scrutiny Committee

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Stephenson.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee held on 15th February, 2010

Councillor Howe stated that he had asked a question regarding the poor quality of bus services on Dykelands Road. This had not been recorded in the minutes nor had he received a response to his question.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the committee were agreed and signed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of the question made by Councillor Howe.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Reference from Cabinet – 10th March, 2010 – City of Sunderland Local Development Framework Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options

The Chief Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which sought the Members advice and consideration of a report considered by Cabinet on 10th March, 2010. This report sought approval of the Sunderland Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options for public consultation.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Neil Cole, Planning Policy Manager, presented the report and advised that the strategy would bring forward plans for the development of the strategic employment sites at Farrington Row, the Vaux site and the site north of Nissan.

Consultation had been undertaken and the revised draft policy had been produced following this consultation.

Councillor Howe commented on the strategic employment sites. He felt that the port was an immediate concern as it had been languishing for a number of years and needed action to be taken to revitalise it. A successful port would be a great asset to the city and would help to put Sunderland back onto the maritime map.

Mr Cole advised that the role of the port had not been forgotten. The sites were identified to gauge ideas for what potential sites were available. The port was experiencing changes and there was new management in place. There were currently no firm plans for the future development of the port however it was certain that it would be remaining as a port.

The Chairman stated that the Port Manager had been employed because the port was making a profit and there was a desire to increase this profitability.

Councillor Howe then commented that the cargos were low value and they were not worthy of long term investment as the return on the investment would be so low.

Councillor Kelly commented on the site to the North of Nissan, there was a large amount of industrial land in Washington and there was a need to utilise this existing land rather than developing on the rapidly disappearing greenbelt land.

Mr Cole advised that all of the industrial sites in Washington had been deemed suitable to be retained; the site to the North of Nissan had been put forward as additional employment land as there were good arguments for the use of this site.

Councillor Kelly then commented that he understood that Washington was a strategic town with good road links however there was a site at Emerson Industrial Estate which was available and there were a large number of the

industrial estates which were becoming retail estates, he would prefer to see development in these areas rather than on greenbelt.

Councillor Wood commented on the net additional housing requirements and advised that the target of 1,150 additional houses per year had not been achieved in recent years. The number of houses available for rent could be a problem and it was disappointing that the gap between supply and demand with regards to social housing had not been reduced. There were proposals that the sites at Farrington Row and Vaux would be used for offices; there was a lot of empty space in Fawcett Street which could be used as office space.

Mr Cole advised that the level of activity within the rental sector had increased. Existing buildings were not always suitable for use as office space as they did not always meet the necessary requirements.

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and the Committee's Comments be referred to Council for consideration.

Reference from Cabinet: 10th March, 2010
St. Peter's Riverside and Bonnersfield Planning Framework – Draft Supplementary Planning Document

The Chief Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which sought the views of the Committee on a report of the Deputy Chief Executive which was considered by Cabinet on 10th March, 2010 which sought approval of the draft St. Peter's Riverside and Bonnersfield Planning Framework and accompanying Strategic Environmental Assessment for the purposes of consultation.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment, presented the report and advised that St. Peters and Bonnersfield was a strategic location which needed a development framework to ensure that there was a balanced mix of land uses and to protect the candidate World Heritage Site. The formal six week consultation process would be commencing within the coming weeks and the final plan would be submitted to the scrutiny committee and Cabinet for adoption.

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and the Committee's endorsement of the report be submitted to Cabinet as part of the Consultation process.

Policy Development and Review 2009/10 – Evidence Gathering

The Traffic Issues Task and Finish Group submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated the Committee of the work of the Committee's Task and Finish Working Group.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Richard Hibbert, Jacobs Consultants, and Andrew Jackman, Interim Assistant Head of Traffic Road Safety, presented the report.

Mr Jackman advised that the Government had required authorities to look at all A and B class roads. This scrutiny committee had decided to look at lower speed roads as well.

Mr Hibbert advised that there had been a review of National and Local policies surrounding 20mph zones and limits. The Council had all of the powers it needed to be able to manage residential streets. It was expected that there would be a national approach to enabling 20mph zones to be implemented where necessary.

The evidence base had been analysed to allow a number of potential pilot areas to be identified. 15 potential areas had been identified by looking at accidents around schools, the nature of the accidents and the average speeds within the areas.

There was a case for implanting 20mph zones in all of the areas identified; these were not the only areas in the City which could need to be 20mph zones.

Monitoring of the zones was important to see what reduction in speeds had occurred and to see if there had been a reduction in the number of accidents. There would be checks after three months to gauge the public reaction followed by a check on the speeds within the area after 12 months. These speed checks would be carried out annually. After three years it would be possible to see information on the changes to safety within the area.

Home Zone Areas were an ideal option as they were relatively low cost but would have a high impact.

Mr Jackman advised that the zones would be self enforcing and there would be traffic calming features only where necessary and only where the 85th percentile speeds were over 25mph. Monitoring reports would be brought back to the Committee on a regular basis. Within new developments there was a need to build in low speeds and where there were infill developments there was a need to reduce speeds on the access roads.

Councillor Kelly advised that he had been part of the Task and Finish Group and he thanked everyone for their involvement in the work of the group. Schemes did not necessarily have to cost a lot to implement as road markings

and signage could be sufficient. There was a need for the Ward Councillors to be involved in deciding which areas the 20mph zones were implemented in as the Ward Councillors would know which areas had the most need for the zones to be introduced. He was curious to see which five areas the 20mph zones would be implemented in.

Councillor Tye commented that this report just validated what Members had been saying for a long time. He felt that there was an issue with resources as there were frequent changes to the staffing of the department. He also wanted to know which five areas would be selected.

Mr Jackman stated that he was conscious that the five areas had not been identified however it was intended that the areas would be identified in time for the production of the report to Cabinet.

Councillor Tye then stated that the consultants had produced a clear set of recommendations, with the proposed areas identified and ranked according to the assessment criteria, and he felt that these recommendations should be adopted.

Councillor E. Gibson expressed concerns over the proposal to only take five of the projects forwards, it had been her understanding that all 15 of the pilot schemes would be developed and that schemes could cost as little as £2,000 for a small scheme and £6,000 for a larger scheme.

Mr Jackman advised that all of the proposals could be taken forwards however there would be significant cost implications and full design work would need to be completed. If there were just signs installed then the costs could be low however if traffic calming measures were needed then these costs would rapidly increase, one speed table would cost in the region of £15,000.

The Chairman added that although installation of speed limit signs was cheaper than introducing 20mph zones, the zones were more effective.

Councillor Wood stated that he was a member of the task and finish group and had attended a visit to North Tyneside where all residential areas were being made 20mph zones. He felt that schools were the obvious place to start with the implementation of the 20mph zones and he could identify two areas within St. Michael's ward. If the schemes were to be low cost then they could potentially be funded using the Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) allocations which were available to the Area Committees.

The Chairman commented that Silksworth had the highest level of accidents and it was good to see that the report had identified this.

Councillor Kelly stated that a number of ventures had been explored in North Tyneside and when the 20mph zones had initially been introduced there had been signs installed and then where necessary there had been markings and other features installed. There was no need to go over the top with the

introduction of traffic calming measures; the identified sites could be turned into 20mph zones by introducing signage and then if necessary to reduce speeds then traffic calming could be introduced at a later date. The schemes in North Tyneside were very effective and 20mph zones were now the norm rather than the exception. There was a need to take all of the proposals forward as it would not be appropriate to cherry pick which schemes to take forward. He was alarmed by the thought that it would cost up to £100,000 to implement a zone.

Mr Jackman advised that he understood Members concerns over costs. It would be easy to implement zones cheaply in areas where speeds were already low. Statistics had shown that there would not be much impact if there were only signs installed as people drove at the speed which they deemed appropriate for the character of the road. A lot of the speed data was collected from the 'Tracker' vehicle tracking system, however this was not installed in many vehicles and as such there was not a large data set and there was a need to attend the sites and collect information using a radar system.

Councillor Kelly accepted the need for more information to be collected however there could not be a lot of time spent collecting the information as the areas needed to have speed reduction measures implemented now.

Councillor E. Gibson stated that Jacobs had done the work and produced the report. There was no need for further work to be carried out as all of the necessary information had already been collected. It would be disappointing if all of the 15 pilot schemes were not implemented.

Mr Jackman advised that additional information gathering was to take place in order to verify the information already available.

The Chairman stated that he did not have a problem with this and commended the excellent work of Jacobs and the Task and Finish group. There was a need to look at delivering all of the schemes identified in the report and they should be taken forward in the order they were ranked in the report.

Councillor Wakefield commented that he felt there was a need to get the schemes underway now and then develop them once they were in place. It was more likely that all of the schemes would be approved if the initial cost implications were lower.

Councillor Tye agreed that the schemes needed to be implemented quickly. He asked whether this would be the final report or whether there would be a further report which would be final.

Councillor Tate advised that if Members wished then this could be the final report.

Councillor Tye then moved that the report be sent to Cabinet for adoption.

Councillor Kelly agreed that the report should be put forward as it was.

Councillor Howe stated that all 15 of the proposals needed to be looked at.

Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, advised that there would be some work done on the format of the report however the content would be staying the same. The report could be brought back to the Committee or sent straight to the Cabinet.

The Chairman moved that the report be passed on with the recommendation to adopt all of the proposals set out in the report.

The Committee agreed with this proposal and as such it was:

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and the proposals be endorsed and referred to Cabinet for adoption.

Allotments Provision in Sunderland Task and Finish Group Final Report

The Allotments Provision Task and Finish Group submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed the Committee of the work of the Task and Finish Group.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Councillor Wakefield presented the report and advised that this had been a large task and a long time had been spent on it. Allotment provision in Sunderland exceeded the legal minimum provision however there were issues regarding quality management and waiting lists.

There were problems in the Coalfield area where allotments had been transferred from the Coal Board; these were old sites which needed investment and improvements to the facilities.

The rent for allotments in Sunderland was significantly less than the rent charged by neighbouring authorities and there was a need to ensure that the rent collected was spent on the allotments. Some of the poor quality allotment sites could be released for housing development so that funds could be released to assist with the improvements of other allotments.

Councillor Kelly stated that he had been on the waiting list for an allotment for the past five years and he had only just been offered an allotment. There had been some sites had been derelict for years and this lead to frustration for people waiting for allotments. The rent charges needed to be more viable as it cost more than the rental charges to maintain the sites. There were regularly suggestions that greenbelt land be used for factories, would there be the possibility of using the greenbelt or former agricultural land for allotments.

Councillor Tye suggested that where there were plots available they could be given to Community Interest Projects as it would be better to give the allotments to community groups for free rather than have the allotments left empty.

Councillor Wakefield stated that it cost approximately £3,500 per plot to upgrade fences, water supplies and other services. There would be no point in selling any sites unless the funds were channelled into upgrading other allotment sites.

Councillor E. Gibson commended the hard work and dedication of the allotment holders who were there every day. There was a need to support the allotment associations as they found it very difficult to get funding.

Councillor Howe commented that the lack of funding was a serious problem. He queried the possibility of using Section 106 planning obligation monies to pay for improvements.

Councillor Wakefield stated that there was a need for more funding and it was important that all money from the rent was reinvested in the allotments. There was a massive issue which needed resolving and some of the allotment sites were in an appalling condition.

Councillor Tye commented that there was a need for the Area Committees to support the allotments. Allotments were at the heart of the community. In what had previously been the South Sunderland Area there had been investment in the sites and they now had excellent facilities including tarmac roads.

Councillor Kelly stated that there was a need to support the allotments more. He also advised that the Area Committees could play a part however the Council needed to increase its Allotments budget.

The Chairman commented that there was the myth that there was not enough allotments however the findings of the group had shown that there was in fact more allotments than minimum requirements and the waiting list was not as long as previously thought. There was a need to improve the quality of the allotments especially in the Coalfield area. There was a need to look at where funding could come from; it was possible that the rent was too low and could be increased.

The Chairman then thanked the group for their report, high quality allotments was an important part of the attractive city. Where there were empty sites these could be given to people for free on the condition that they clean up the allotment and put it to use.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and the recommendations of the task and finish group be referred to Cabinet.

Provision and Management of Cemeteries

The Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which advised the Committee of the current position with regards to provision and capacity of burial space within the City's cemeteries.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

John Blyth, Cemeteries & Crematorium Manager, presented the report and welcomed comments and questions from the Committee.

Councillor Kelly commented that he was disappointed to hear the excuse that there was contamination from industry preventing sites being used for cemeteries in Washington. He was concerned that the dead from Washington needed to be buried in other parts of Sunderland or the Coalfield.

Councillor Wood queried what extent vandalism was a problem in cemeteries.

Mr Blyth advised that there was a lot of damage attributed to vandals however vandalism was not as big a problem as people thought.

Councillor Tye commented that the Council had been accused of vandalism following the laying flat of headstones. He felt that in the future there needed to be a more sensible approach to safety and there needed to be more risk assessment.

Mr Blyth advised that the Council had been told to look at the headstones straight away and any with a potential to fall needed to be laid flat. Since this initial rectification work any unstable headstones which had been identified had been pocketed and this had lead to a reduction in the number of complaints.

Councillor Howe commented that it was good to see that there was enough cemetery space to last for the next 25 years.

The Chairman stated that he agreed with Councillor Kelly that there would be suitable plots in Washington. He found it unacceptable that people were not able to be buried in the town they lived in.

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Visit to Fawcett Street – Feedback

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which allowed Members to give consideration to the issues raised during the tour of Fawcett Street which was undertaken on 12th March, 2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment, presented the report and advised Members of the findings which had centred on pavement provision, vehicular movement, street scene, built environment and economic factors.

These findings would be used to develop recommendations and an action plan for improvements to the area.

Councillor Wakefield commented that the library was not obvious enough; it should be projected into the street to make it more of a focal point.

Councillor Tye suggested that the empty buildings could have high definition advertising screens installed in the windows as had been done at the Metro Centre.

Mr Lowes advised that this was being given consideration however there needed to be consideration given to ways of installing the advertising without the need for planning permission. In the Metro Centre or The Bridges there was no need for planning permission. The situation with empty buildings was dynamic, with the shops often reopening quickly.

Councillor Wood commented on the street scene aspect. There was no need for some of the traffic lights on Fawcett Street. There was a need to improve the built environment and improve the buildings in the area. Flags could be flown to add colour to the street. He queried what the next steps would be and what timescales were in place for developing the actions.

Mr Lowes advised that there would be large cost implications to a wholesale improvement project. There were currently street scene improvements being piloted to see what value for money there would be and what public opinion would be on the changes. There was a need to start planning for 2011 onwards.

The Chairman requested that a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee. Mr Lowes agreed to provide this.

Councillor Kelly commented that he felt Fawcett Street was little more than a bus lane which created an intimidating environment for pedestrians. Northumberland Street in Newcastle had been like this however it had been pedestrianised which had made the street much more pleasant. This could be a possible course of action for Fawcett Street and would help with achieving other aims such as improving the projection of the library.

Mr Lowes advised that there would be technical issues involved with pedestrianising the street and this had been looked at previously. The current position would be reported in the next report to the committee.

Councillor Wakefield agreed that the buses were intimidating and that pedestrianisation of the street would make a huge difference.

The Chairman commented that the visit was a good idea. He had noticed that people were not staying within Fawcett Street; they were carrying out their business and then leaving. There was no café culture within the street unlike in streets of this type in other cities.

7. RESOLVED that the feedback report be received and noted and a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the committee.

Work Programme 2009-10

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the current Work Programme for the Committee's work during the 2009-10 Council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

The Chairman advised that the End of Year Report and the report on Gritting of Roads in Winter Weather would be included on the agenda for the April meeting of the Committee.

8. RESOLVED that the current work programme for 2009-10 be received and noted.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 March 2010 – 30 June 2010

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an opportunity to consider the items within the remit of the Committee which were included in the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1st March to 30th June, 2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

The Chairman advised that there had been an updated plan produced since the Agenda had been published. This updated plan covered the period 1st April, 2010 to 31st July, 2010 and the extract showing the items within the remit of the Committee had been circulated to Members.

Councillor Wood queried when there would be a report to the Committee on the Highway Maintenance Programme.

Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, advised that it was expected that there would be a report submitted to the June meeting of the Committee.

9. RESOLVED that report be received and noted and consideration be given to the Executive's Forward Plan.

(Signed) G. MILLER,
Chairman.