

At a meeting of the SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 16TH MARCH, 2010 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Watson in the Chair

Councillors M. Dixon, Ellis, Errington, Rolph, J. Scott, L. Walton and Wilson.

Also Present:-

Councillor Tate – Chairman of the Management Scrutiny Committee

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Foster and Wares.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 19th January, 2010

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19th January, 2010 be confirmed as a correct record subject to the following amendments:-
 - i) Paragraph 7, page 3 – Councillor Ellis to be added to the list of Members who offered congratulations on the production of the Design Guide.
 - ii) Pages 4-5 – all references to 'Julie Grey' be amended to read 'Julie Gray'.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

State of the City's Historic Built Environment Review

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to inform Members of the current circumstances with regard to the City's designated built heritage assets.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mike Lowe, Principal Planner, presented the item which detailed the development of the 'State of the Historic Environment Report' which was presented to Council in April 2007 (revised 2008), the main areas of change since it was issued together with priorities for 2010/2011.

Councillor Ellis advised that she had had a good look at the on line document and while she appreciated that the service had limited resources with regard to staffing and budget, she would welcome the document being 'fleshed out' to cover underlisted areas such as Houghton. For example she cited Rectory Park which she believed to be the oldest garden in the British Isles. In addition she informed Mr. Lowe that she had tried to access the register of listed buildings on the Council's web site but had been unable to load it.

Mr. Lowe replied that the document only included those assets which had a formal designation. For example, the Register of Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest compiled by English Heritage only contained two Sunderland parks, Mowbray and Roker. While he did not doubt the significance of Rectory Park, it had not been included in the document as it had not received the same formal designation as Mowbray and Roker.

Councillor Rolph stated that she was interested to hear Mr. Lowes' comments regarding the Register of Parks and Gardens and asked if there was anything the Council could do to influence the nomination process, in particular 'going out to bat' for Rectory Park given its historic significance. She referred to paragraph 1.2 and advised that in fact the Committee had requested such a report as far back as last November rather than just last month. The report had been requested because Members had felt that a silo mentality operated between the Planning side and Cultural side of the heritage remit.

Mr. Lowes advised the Register of Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest had been initiated in 1995 by English Heritage who had asked the five local authorities to undertake a joint survey of parks throughout Tyne and Wear. Following an appraisal process, Mowbray and Roker had been selected for the register. Mr. Lowes stated that he did not know the criteria upon which the selection had been based. It would be possible for the Council to present a case and make recommendations but the decision regarding any final listing would be down to English Heritage.

He hoped that it did not appear that a silo mentality existed between the two aspects of the Heritage remit. Officers from Planning and Culture met regularly to exchange information and more formal liaisons were held every two months. He assured Members that Planning and Community and Cultural Services did not work in isolation and acted collectively with regard to matters such as the Heritage Open Days, Fulwell Mill and Bowes Railway.

Councillor Dixon referred to paragraph 3.2 and asked for clarification regarding the statement "there are a small number of very significant public/voluntary sector schemes in the pipeline that may progress".

Mr. Lowes replied that the paragraph referred to grant schemes currently operating in the East End of the City funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Specifically these related to Holy Trinity Church, Sunderland Orphanage and a project to improve interpretation of the East End. The latter project was being carried out in conjunction

with Living History North East and included an audio guide for self guided walks in Hendon and the East End.

There being no further questions for Mr. Lowe, the Chairman thanked him for his report and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

English Heritage Christmas Workshop

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided a brief overview of the English Heritage Christmas Workshop attended by Members of the Committee on Monday 14th December, 2009 which centred on partnership working and opportunities for effective scrutiny.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report highlighting how the workshop had looked at how scrutiny functions could monitor, support or promote the mainstreaming of heritage protection into service areas, by:-

- questioning Cabinet proposals as they were developed;
- recommending that links to heritage issues were included in relevant Cabinet reports;
- including issues in the scoping criteria for Scrutiny Reviews.

The Workshop concluded that local authorities needed to share their experiences and examples of heritage related scrutiny across the region.

The overriding message was one of making the new scrutiny powers work for the benefit of both overview and scrutiny committees and partners. Ensuring that partners respond to scrutiny effectively, and that the Council was open and clear about its priorities and the information required.

Councillor Ellis stated that she had been very pleased to attend the Workshop which she had found extremely useful and informative. She enquired whether the Council held a local list of heritage sites valued by the local community.

Mr. Lowes advised that the Authority did not currently hold such a list, however, if resources permit it was hoped to compile one during 2010/2011. The Authority was currently liaising with local Heritage Groups, however, the promised Guidance Note on Best Practice in Relation to Local Lists was still awaited from English Heritage. Mr. Lowes stated that there was desire from some heritage groups to see a local list produced for Sunderland and in many ways this would be a positive step as it encouraged engagement. However on the negative side it raised expectations and an assumption that the local authority was able to provide protection. In reality the Council would be powerless to prevent developers demolishing a building if it wished.

Councillor Ellis commented that a variety of useful and important information could be gleaned by tapping into the knowledge of ordinary people.

Councillor Rolph reported that an interesting issue arising from the Workshop had been the idea of audits of War Memorials. This was extremely important given the number of memorials erected in old schools and businesses. She asked Mr. Lowes if Sunderland had carried out such an audit. In addition she asked if the Council included heritage related questions in the annual Mori Survey or used Community Spirit to ask the public what they expected from the Council with regard to heritage.

Mr. Lowes advised that the Council did not currently have an audited list of war memorials however he believed that colleagues within Land and Property Services may be undertaking work in this regard. Mr. Cummings advised that he would liaise with Mr. Lowes in trying to obtain a list from Property Services. In addition Mr. Lowes advised that there were certain war memorials in Sunderland that had been officially listed. The Authority was also in discussion with the 'Brothers in Arms' organisation regarding a piece of work to honour service men and women who had fallen since the Second World War.

With regard to the annual Mori Survey, Mr. Lowes confirmed that it contained no specific questions with regard to the historic built environment but that Community Spirit was engaged when consultation was sought on various issues.

Councillor Errington asked whether the Council was looking to encourage people to expand their interest in local history and find out more about their local areas. He cited the 50th Anniversary of the founding of Washington New Town as an example of an event that could act as a catalyst to generate interest.

Mr. Lowes advised that Sunderland had a Heritage Forum which acted as a direct interface between planning/culture and local heritage groups.

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Review into Local Studies Provision in Sunderland: Draft Report

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members of the Committee with the first draft report in relation to the mini-review in local studies which presented in detail the evidence gathered, together with the research and conclusions drawn throughout the review process.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report advising that it had been submitted to Members for comment with regard to relevance, clarity and accuracy. The final draft would be submitted for consideration at the Committee's April meeting.

Councillor Ellis stated that local studies was so important to so many people that serious consideration should be given to providing local studies centres in areas such as Houghton rather than being centralised. Helen Lancaster, Assistant Scrutiny Officer, advised that Councillor Scott had also made the same point, during

the course of the study however, the library service had replied that this would actually involve people having to travel greater distances. Members have expressed a degree of incredulity at this response. Mr. Cummings advised that he would make enquires and in any case would reference Councillor Ellis' point in the report.

Councillor Rolph referred to the comment regarding the need to establish local centres and advised that the Ancestry website could be accessed via links in Houghton. As more and more information was digitised it should become available via local libraries.

Councillor Rolph advised that the recommendations accurately reflected the findings of the Working Group, however, she believed that Recommendation 2 should be amended to read 'in conjunction with the registrars'. She also suggested that there should be a better explanation of the local studies unique selling points and reference to the BS 5454 recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents. With regard to Recommendation 5, she wondered whether the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) would be able to co-ordinate the production of the guide.

In conclusion Councillor Rolph advised that she would email a copy of her comments to Mr. Cummings and Ms. Lancaster.

Councillor A. Wilson pointed out that the recommendations detailed in the tabled report were listed (a) to (i) where as previously they had been numbered (1) to (9) which she believed was preferable.

The Chairman and Members having congratulated Ms. Lancaster and Mr. Cummings on their report, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the draft recommendations, together with Members' comments and amendments, be included in the final review report of local studies by the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee;
- ii) the final review report be presented to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee at its April 2010 meeting prior to its submission to Cabinet.

Policy Development and Review

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members of the Committee with the first draft report in relation to the Committee's policy review on access to social housing which presented in detail the evidence gathered, together with the research and conclusion drawn throughout the review process.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report advising that it had been submitted to Members for comment with regard to relevance, clarity and accuracy. The final draft would be submitted for consideration at the Committee's April

meeting. Mr. Cummings informed Members that prior to this, the Working Group would meet again to talk through the recommendations.

The Chairman stated that she had really enjoyed being part of the Working Group and urged Members to forward any comments or amendments to Mr. Cummings as soon as possible. The Committee having congratulated Mr. Cummings on his endeavours to pull the report together, he advised that he would write to Members in due course with the date of the Working Group.

5. RESOLVED that following final consideration of the recommendations by the Working Group, the final review report be presented to the Sustainable Communities Committee at its April meeting prior to submission to Cabinet.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st April to 31st July, 2010

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1st April – 31st July, 2010 which related to sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Helen Lancaster, Assistant Scrutiny Officer, having drawn Members' attention to the most recent version of the plan (copy tabled) published following the dispatch of the agenda, it was:-

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Work Programme 2009-10

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching for Members' information, the Committee's current Work Programme for the 2009-10 Council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Helen Lancaster, Assistant Scrutiny Officer, invited the Committee to note the work programme.

Councillor Rolph stated that the April meeting should also include reports back from Culture and Tourism and on the Sport Conference.

Ms. Lancaster having advised that she would write to Members with details of the Annual Scrutiny Conference it was:-

7. RESOLVED that the work programme be received and noted.

There being no further business on the agenda, the Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) S. WATSON,
Chairman.