

At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENTAL AND PLANNING REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on MONDAY, 16th MARCH, 2009 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Councillors Ball, E. Gibson, Kelly, D. Richardson, Scaplehorn, Wakefield, Whalen, Wood and A. Wright

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors I. Cuthbert and Tye

Also Present

Councillor Tate – Chair of Policy and Co-ordination Review Committee
Councillor Blackburn – Planning and Transportation Portfolio Holder

Minutes of the last Meeting of the Committee held on 16th February, 2009

Councillor Wakefield advised that since the last meeting there had been an increase in the Number of Traffic Police using speed cameras.

Councillor Wood asked that Mr Johnson provide a report to the Committee regarding Tunstall Hope Road. Burney Johnson, Head of Transport and Engineering advised that there would be a review of 60mph speed limits and that when this review took place Tunstall Hope Road would be given priority.

Councillor Richardson advised that he had not received a copy of the Annual Parking Report. Mr Johnson apologised for this and agreed to send him a copy.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Local Transport Plan LTP2 – Progress Report

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which allowed Members to consider a report on the progress made on the delivery of the Local Transport Plan (LTP2) 2006/11.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Rohail Ahmed from the LTP Core Team presented the report. Burney Johnson, Head of Transport and Engineering, and Councillor Jim Blackburn, Planning and Transportation Portfolio Holder and Chair of the Tyne and Wear Joint Lead Members (Transport), were also available to answer any questions from Members.

Councillor E. Gibson advised that some areas of the City which were away from the 'Superoutes' had very poor bus services with no service at all after 9p.m. This made it difficult for people to use public transport and caused suffering for communities.

Councillor Kelly commented that he had met with Nexus approximately 5 years ago when he had been told that Washington would be provided with a 'Superoute' however the outlying areas still did not have good bus links. He also advised that it was often cheaper for people to take taxis than to get buses at night.

Councillor D. Richardson also raised concerns over bus service provision. He advised that Houghton had good links into Sunderland however Fence Houses had a very poor service.

Mr Ahmed addressed these issues, stating that there was a programme being developed with the bus operators which would result in a Public Transport Scheme being implemented which would see improvements being made in Public Transport and Facilities. He also advised that there were different approaches which could be taken to persuade bus operators to run less profitable services. These ranged from a softer 'carrot' approach where Nexus work with the operators to get the required services provided. The other approach would be the 'stick' approach where bus operators would be told where the services needed to be run. The softer approaches would be preferable.

Councillor Wood asked what effect the Integrated Transport Authority (ITA) would have on the Local Transport Plan when it replaced the Passenger Transport Authority (PTA).

Mr Ahmed advised that there was a governance review being carried out which was being led by Newcastle City Council and the City Region and that the full package was being looked into.

Councillor Kelly commented that diesel costs had increased and then fallen however fares had continued to increase. This needed to be looked at as it was often cheaper to drive than take the bus.

Mr Ahmed stated that he could not give a definitive answer regarding fares. He advised that Councillors should write to the bus companies with their concerns. The bus operators were businesses and the concessionary fares needed to be balanced with the full fares. People wanted a reliable, comfortable, convenient and cheap service.

Mr Johnson added to the information that had already been provided. He advised that Nexus had been involved with developing the strategy and that it was a formally adopted strategy for Tyne and Wear. He stated that there would be a network review which would look at the profitability of routes and the standard of service. This was to become the basis for the quality partnership discussions and would take place this year.

Councillor Wood advised that the services were profitable and the Bus Operators in Sunderland made a profit however there was a danger that if the profits did not increase then services could be cut.

Councillor Blackburn advised that the Local Transport Plan covered four main areas: Congestion; Air Quality; Accessibility; and Road Safety. He thanked Councillor Wood for providing information as a member of the Passenger Transport Authority and Integrated Transport Authority.

The Members thanked Councillor Blackburn and Mr Ahmed for their attendance.

2. RESOLVED that the progress report be received and noted.

Sunderland City Council Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) 2009-2024

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which allowed Members to consider the report of the Director of Development and Regeneration that was considered by Cabinet on 11th March, 2009.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Neil Cole, Planning Policy Manager, presented the report. He introduced Jim Daly, Senior Planner, who had a primary role in developing the assessment to answer any questions. He also advised that the assessment was mandatory and all authorities had been required to perform an assessment.

Councillor A. Wright commented on the shortfall and catch-up figures and advised that the houses which had been cleared by Gentoo had been family homes and that they were being replaced mostly by flats and apartments.

In response to Councillor A. Wright's comments and further questions, Mr Cole advised that:

- Gentoo were remodelling the housing stock so that it continued to be what residents required. Family accommodation was being looked at.
- There needed to be sufficient sites to accommodate the new development.
- The proximity of sites to local services was examined using a Standard Model to determine the density of housing. If the site was over 1km away from services then the density would be a maximum of 30 dwellings per hectare. For sites less than 1km from services a density of 50 dwellings per hectare would be permitted.
- Each site would be individually examined to determine its suitability.
- This was the start of the process and the sites would be reviewed every year to check if there had been developments and whether there were any new sites available.

Councillor Wakefield queried the 26 percent of sites being Greenfield.

Mr Daly advised that the target was for around 70 percent of sites being Brownfield and this target had been met.

Mr Cole added that Greenfield sites would only be developed if there would be a positive impact on the area if the site was developed.

Councillor Wakefield then commented that there needed to be careful planning when developing sites as in Fence Houses there had been a mixed use development of residential and industrial which resulted in problems. He also asked whether there would be controls in place to prevent everyone with a plot of land from building.

Mr Cole stated that sites would be examined and disregarded if they were unsuitable. The developments would need to be appropriate for the site.

Mr Daly added that there was a sifting process to ensure that only realistic sites were included in the SHLAA.

Councillor Wood asked about the shortfall mentioned in Table 1 of the report. He commented that he felt the shortfall could be due to Gentoo not building sufficient houses.

Mr Cole advised that the shortfall was the result of a mix of too few houses being built and the demolition of properties. The net requirement identified in the Regional Spatial Strategy had been looked at to calculate the Performance Adjustment. There had been a large quantity of houses built however the problem lay in the number of houses which had been demolished which had brought the figures down.

Councillor Richardson advised that there was a need to learn from mistakes such as the Cherry Way site where houses had been built opposite factories. He commented that there had been a planning application received for a similar development. The Chairman advised that this application had been refused.

Mr Daly advised that the site in question had not been included in the figures.

Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment, advised that the government target for development on Brownfield sites was 60 percent and the target in the Regional Spatial Strategy was 70 percent. Both of these targets had been satisfied comfortably.

Mr Lowes also advised that there was a list of sites with planning permission and a list of possible sites and people could argue for the inclusion or removal of sites.

Councillor Kelly commented that Washington had an unusual layout with the housing areas being separated by industrial estates. Some of these industrial estates were a cause for concern as they were in a state of disrepair and were neglected. He asked whether there was a potential to change the use of the land to enable housing to be built.

Mr Cole advised that there was a need to maintain a wide portfolio of land uses and that an additional 250,000 hectares of employment land needed to be allocated. Forecasting and trend analysis would be used in order to identify whether industrial land was economically viable. It was possible to reallocate land for different uses if required.

Councillor Kelly stated that he did not advocate widespread reallocation of industrial land however land needed to be used effectively.

The Chairman advised that industry came before housing as the city needed to be economically viable.

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Local Development Framework – Amendments to Local Development Scheme

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which allowed Members to consider the report of the Director of Development and Regeneration which was considered by Cabinet on 11th March, 2009.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Neil Cole, Planning Policy Manager, presented the report and welcomed questions and comments from Members.

Councillor Wakefield expressed concerns that the two plans appeared to be running in parallel. He stated that the Hetton Downs Action Plan and School Place Planning would have a major, continued impact.

The Chairman echoed these concerns and advised that residents had concerns over the potential lack of school places in areas with new developments.

Mr Cole and Mr Lowes advised that the plans had been held back in order to address the issue and that the problem with basing school places on new housing was that the new developments may not be built which would lead to a surplus of places.

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Cabinet Report – Councillor Call for Action Guidance

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with the report of the Chief Executive and City Solicitor which was presented to Cabinet on 11th March, 2009.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Jim Diamond, Review Co-ordinator, presented the report. He advised that it was a reference from Cabinet which provided members with a summary of the guidance and implications relating to the new powers for Councillors. It was designed to help members solve problems within their wards.

Councillor Wood commented that he found it difficult to envisage the procedure being used frequently and that it would be a last resort with other methods of solving problems being pursued first.

The Chairman advised that he supported the principles however it seemed to be a very complex procedure and he hoped there would not be as much red tape as there looked. He expressed concerns that the right to have Councillor Call for Action items included on scrutiny agendas could be used to bulk out already busy meetings.

The Members advised that the example regarding the School was a very poor example as schools were controlled by the Head teachers and governing bodies. The Chairman asked that the example be removed from the report.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and the comments made be taken into account.

Work Programme 2008-09

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided, for Members information, the current work programme for the Committee's work during the 2008-09 Council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Jim Diamond, Review Coordinator, presented the report.

The Chairman advised that he had asked Officers to look at the work flow for next year to prevent the large amount of work on the meetings late in the year while the earlier meetings had very few items. He wanted to see a smoother pattern with each meeting having a similar amount of work.

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

(Signed) G. MILLER,
Chairman.