

At a meeting of the PROSPERITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on WEDNESDAY 16TH MARCH, 2011 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Mordey in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Cuthbert, D. Forbes, P. Gibson, Howe, Snowdon, A. Wright and T. Wright.

Also Present:-

Councillor D. Tate – Chairman of the Management Scrutiny Committee.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Old and J.B. Scott.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee held on 16th February, 2011

Councillor Cuthbert recalled that with regard to the presentation from Mr. Olabode on the Evolve Business centre he had asked, and it was confirmed by Mr. Olabode, that he would be in favour of the return of enterprise zones. This had not been recorded in the minutes and Councillor Cuthbert asked that they were amended accordingly.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 16th February, 2011 be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the above amendment.

Change in the Order of Business

The Chairman advised Members that he would be taking item 6 on the agenda (Former Vaux Brewery Site) at this juncture to allow Mr. Lowes to leave thereafter and attend another meeting outside of the building.

Former Vaux Brewery Site – Sunderland City Centre

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which introduced Mr. Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment, who was to provide Members with a verbal progress report on the Vaux Site.

Members were informed that the Vaux site came into Council ownership on 24th February but officers had already considered the broad strategic approach to dealing with the site in both the short and medium terms.

For short-term site remediation, £2 million had been put forward as a bid into the capital budget for 2011/12 which was agreed at Council on 2nd March, 2011. Following the demolition of the former brewery, it is understood that the site has been levelled to a loose state with spread demolition material and ground obstructions in the form of hard standings and roadways remaining.

Remediation of the site served two purposes. First, the removal of contaminated material and breaking up of demolition residue meant that a clean site would be available for handover for redevelopment purposes. Secondly, pending master planning, marketing and redevelopment, the appearance of the site could be greatly improved at this important gateway to the city centre and consideration could be given to appropriate temporary uses.

Survey work was currently ongoing to help in the assessment of site conditions, including a remediation strategy to deal with contamination and capping off the two known wells that had been temporarily sealed with demolition material. As there was a fall of about six metres across the site – south to north – estimates as to the amount of imported material that would need to create a "level" area were being calculated.

The survey work would provide the basis for drawing up a remediation specification from which tender documents would be prepared and issued to civil engineering and landscape contractors. Planning permission would be required and the application would be publicised and considered by the Development Control (North Sunderland) Sub-Committee in the normal way.

Depending on the depth of remediation proposed, a phase of archaeological investigation may be required including arranging for an archaeologist with a watching brief to be present on site during reclamation operations. Completion of this process would again help in reducing one of the constraints to redevelopment.

Following the completion of due processes it was the intention that the contractor would be on site mid-summer 2011 with an estimated period for completion of

around 6 to 9 months. At the same time the Single Investment Delivery Team (operational from 1st April, 2011) would pursue a strategy for marketing the site leading to its redevelopment in accordance with the planning policies for the site and the aims and objectives of the economic master plan. The Council knew what it wanted from the site, i.e. a central business district or Doxford International in the centre of Sunderland.

The Chairman offered his congratulations and thanks to Mr. Lowes and his team for their efforts and hard work during the final rounds of negotiations.

Councillor Alan Wright referred to statements made at last year's Scrutiny Committee by David Walker that from having obtained the freehold of the site, development could still take up to 10 years. Mr. Lowes confirmed that this was not an unrealistic estimate, he cited the incremental growth of Doxford International over a similar time period as an example.

With regard to the levelling of the site for the intermediate period, Councillor Howe asked if one of the potential temporary uses could be as a car park. Mr. Lowes confirmed that this would be a consideration.

Councillor Cuthbert acknowledged the importance of looking to the future rather than dwelling on the past, however it was equally important that any lessons from the past were learned. He cited for example potential pitfalls regarding investment as encountered with the Holmeside Triangle Scheme.

In response to a further enquiry from Councillor Cuthbert, Mr. Lowes advised that it was likely that a new planning consent would be required as that formally granted to the Arc was likely to have expired.

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

2. RESOLVED that the verbal update from the Head of Planning and Environment be received and noted.

Low Carbon Economy Policy Review – Evidence Gathering

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which introduced the following who were present to provide evidence to the Committee in relation to the potential skills requirements of a low carbon economy and on work to reduce carbon emissions from the region's public transport operators.

- i) Helen Matthews, Head of Business Development at Nexus;
- ii) Gary Cumisky, Head of Construction at City of Sunderland College;
- iii) Mick Brophy MD Business, Innovation and Development at Gateshead College.

Ms. Matthews having briefed the Committee on measures to reduce the level of carbon emissions from public transport operating in the region addressed comments and questions from Members in relation to:-

- the provision of real time information boards at bus stops;
- the various technologies with regard to fuel development and the reasons for the current reliance on hybrid vehicles;
- the potential to develop regenerative power from Metro braking systems to return energy to the network;
- the perceived over dependence on electric vehicles and the lack of coverage of charging points together with the ability of the national grid to cope with demand;
- training to enable public transport drivers to drive more efficiently and effectively;
- confidence as to whether the carbon footprint of public transport would continue to reduce.

Mr. Cumisky having briefed the Committee on the work undertaken by the City of Sunderland College in the field of Renewable Technology Training be addressed questions and comments from Members in relation to:-

- the work of the College in conjunction with the 14 to 19 Sunderland Partnership and its links with ETEC and Springboard;
- the extent to which the construction industry were prepared to engage with Renewable Technology Training Providers;
- the uptake by school leavers of Renewable Technology Training;
- the dearth of apprenticeships;
- the extent to which the qualifications provided were recognised.

Mr. Brophy having advised the Committee of the New and Renewable Energy and Sustainability Training provided by Gateshead College answered questions and comments from Members with regard to:-

- the tie in between the 14 to 16 partnership and the school curriculum;
- measures to keep jobs in the UK given the trend for firms to send IT and finance jobs 'offshore'.

- measures to tackle a feeling that the UK was already behind Germany, Sweden and Norway in exploiting opportunities provided by the Low Carbon Economy.

The Chairman having thanked Ms. Matthews, Mr. Cumisky and Mr. Brophy for their presentations, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report and presentations be received and noted.

Low Carbon Place Task and Finish Group Work Programme 2010-11

Claire Harrison, Assistant Scrutiny Officer, presented a report of the Chief Executive (copy circulated) which provided Members with the current Work Programme for the Committee's Low Carbon Place Task and Finish Group for the 2010-11 Council Year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Harrison advised that the half day retrofit visit would take place on 29th March. Members also agreed to undertake a visit to Gentoo on the same day. Councillor Gibson having thanked Ms. Harrison for circulating the information requested in respect of NAREC, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the Low Carbon Place Task and Finish Group Work Programme for 2010-2011 be received and noted.

Draft Annual Report of the Committee

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which presented the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee Annual Report for approval as part of the Overall Scrutiny Annual Report 2010/11 for submission to Council.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

5. RESOLVED that approval be given to the Annual Report for inclusion in the Overall Scrutiny Annual Report 2010/11 and to Submission to Cabinet at its meeting to be held on 14th April, 2011.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st March, 2011 – 30th 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 1st March to 30th June, 2011 which related to the Prosperity and Economic Development Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

6. 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).

The Chairman advised that the Committee would meet with Matthew Hunt, Port Director, as part of a tour of the facility prior to consideration of the Port's Business Plan which was due to be submitted to the Committee early in the new municipal year. Mr. Diamond advised that interim Policy Review recommendations would be issued, with the review itself continuing into a second year.

7. RESOLVED that the Committee's Work Programme for 2010-11 be received and noted.

The Chairman then closed the meeting having thanked everyone for their attendance and wishing them a safe journey home.

(Signed) M. MORDEY
Chairman