

At a meeting of the ECONOMIC PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held remotely on TUESDAY 13TH APRIL, 2021 at 4.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor M. Thornton in the Chair

Councillors Blackburn, Blackett, M. Dixon, Fagan, Foster, Jenkins, Marshall and D E Snowden.

Also in attendance:-

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

Mr Paul Wood, Principal Governance Services Officer, Sunderland City Council

Ms Catherine Auld, Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration

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

Apologies for Absence

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillors Jackson, Taylor and Turner

Minutes of the Last Ordinary Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 9th March 2021

A copy of the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 9th March, 2021 was submitted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 9th March, 2021 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

Councillor M. Dixon made an open declaration that he had provided a reference for an individual involved in starting up a business within 170-171 High Street East which was mentioned in Item 4 Heritage Regeneration Update for Year 2020-21.

Heritage Regeneration Update for Year 2020-21

The Executive Director of City Development submitted a report (copy circulated) and informing the Committee of the progress being made in delivering the regeneration of a number of key sites within the city.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Ms Catherine Auld, Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration, presented the report and was on hand to answer Members queries.

Councillor Blackett commented that he believed there had been some great work done in the City on Heritage over the past few years, however at times in relation to community engagement at times some of the things going on in the City Centre have left the community out of the loop slightly such as the 1719 project where there were concerns about the organ being moved from the Holy Trinity Church, which residents were unhappy about at the time.

Councillor Blackett referred to the church pews which he had been told would be sold off to residents as part of a first refusal originally but sadly in the end they were sold off to a high end antique buyer so he felt the projects had a little way to go to ensure the community was fully involved.

Councillor Blackett also referred to a recent article in the news regarding Roman activity in the Wear and enquired if we could try and bring archaeology into the mix a little more and suggested the portable antiquities society be contacted so that residents could bring their finds to be examined by an expert and become involved in that way.

Ms Auld advised that she would certainly take these points away for consideration and she was aware of the conversations being had with regards to the Roman activity and they were working with Gary Bankhead and the North Area Committee closely on this.

Ms Auld commented that they do work with the County Archaeologist Team across Tyne and Wear and she wasn't familiar with the portable antiquities society but she was sure the Team would be and she could find out more about this.

Ms Auld acknowledged that it was a helpful point in terms of the community engagement and it was interesting in terms of the volunteers who had joined some of the programmes was not the numbers you may have hoped for in some cases so maybe there was ways to do this and to encourage greater numbers.

The Chairman requested that Ms Auld feed back on the points raised by Councillor Blackett relating to archaeology as this would be of interest to the Committee.

Councillor M. Dixon thanked Ms Auld for the great work done in the City by her and the team and enquired as to the plans for 177 High Street and 1-2 Villiers Street and its future use. Ms Auld advised that it was early days in terms of those buildings but the Team were working on it and ideally it would follow a similar type of logic to work on 171 -175 with the Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust in terms of restoring the building and bringing it back into active use and conversations have been had with potential people who might be interested in the use of the building but obviously a process would need to be followed in terms of that side of things with an appropriate focus to attract the right kind of businesses/ occupiers that aren't competing with each other, rather supporting each other.

Ms Auld also advised that they already had some initial feasibility funding for the project and then it would be onto the next stage in terms of more significant funding in order to be able to progress that.

Councillor M. Dixon commented that this would be encouraging and rather than piecemeal developments it was carrying on the heritage in some sort of a plan.

Councillor M. Dixon enquired about the funding given for High Streets and how this was linked to heritage, and if there was any links in terms of funding. Ms Auld advised that the funding was allocated for specific projects but one projects involved did have a strong heritage link which was the Elephant Tea Rooms which would come into two phases. Firstly they were going out to procure the architect for the restoration of the shop front and then the next stage would be to go upstairs in terms of the residential and commercial units there.

With regards to Mackie's Corner, Councillor M. Dixon commented that this was a brilliant development and hopefully this would help increase the footfall in that area.

In response to Councillor M. Dixon's enquiry over the ownership of the Peacock local establishment and the plans for it going forward, Ms Auld advised that she would need to check but she was fairly sure this was owned by the MAC Trust, which linked into the wider MAC Quarter so her understanding was that it stood on its own two feet as a commercial pub but it also had the upstairs space which had a new partnership established with the University in terms of the music link which may help in getting a more steady flow of people to use it.

Councillor Foster commented that Gary Bankhead had attended the North Area Meeting and had provided a great presentation on the roman activity and he had no doubt Ms Auld would receive plenty of updates on that from the Area Chairman.

Councillor Foster referred to the Sunderland Minster development and the pictures of the interpretation board in place and enquired as to what was behind the differing stonework. Ms Auld commented that she was sure there was a conservation reason for this but she would ask the Team for clarity.

Having fully considered the report, the Chairman thanked Ms Auld for her attendance

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

Annual Work Programme 2020-21

The Scrutiny and Members Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated), to provide options, provide support and advise Members on the development of the scrutiny work programmes for 2020/2021

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer presented the report for Members information and advised that there were a few items which had not made this years current work programme but rest assured these could be carried forward onto next years programme.

Mr Diamond also advised that he would add the Chairman's earlier request for an update on the Future High Streets fund to the programme.

Councillor M. Dixon wished to thank Mr Diamond and the rest of the team for his work over the many years and the Committee has had a full programme.

The Chairman commented on behalf of the Committee that the work of Mr Diamond was most appreciated in keeping the work programme topical, fresh and varied for Members to scrutinise.

3. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme for 2020-2021 be noted.

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 22nd February, 2021 (copies circulated).

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

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer reminded Members to contact him if they required further information on any of the items included in the notice.

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

The Chairman thanked Members and Officers for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) M. THORNTON,
Chairman.