

At a meeting of the REGENERATION AND COMMUNITY REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on WEDNESDAY, 18TH MARCH, 2009 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor J. Scott in the Chair

Councillors Ball, Copeland, M. Dixon, M. Forbes, Peter Maddison, Stephenson, Vardy, S. Watson and D. Wilson.

Also Present:-

Councillor R.D. Tate – Chairman of the Policy and Co-ordination Review Committee.

Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman welcomed and introduced Ms. Charlotte Burnham, the recently appointed Head of Scrutiny, who was attending the meeting as an observer before officially taking up her position on 27th April, 2009.

Apology for Absence

An apology for absence was submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor O'Connor.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee held on 18th February, 2009

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Committee held on 18th February, 2009 (copy circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no interests declared.

Sunderland Arc – Progress Report

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which introduced a comprehensive presentation from Mr. David Walker, Chief Executive of Sunderland arc, in respect of the progress being made in its work to deliver physical regeneration in Sunderland

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

Mr Walker explained that the presentation reflected on the update to the Policy and Co-ordination Review Committee in November 2008, focussing on:-

- the impact of the 'Credit Crunch' on Sunderland;
- the priorities for Sunderland;
- a site by site update in relation to Holmeside, Farringdon Row, Sunnyside, Stadium Village, the Sunderland Strategic Transport Corridor (SSTC) and the former Glassworks site;
- the Investment Plan and Economic Master Plan; and
- providing a summary of the situation and key actions that need to be undertaken to progress the regeneration of the City.

In relation to the Vaux site and the Tesco position, Mr. Walker advised that the situation was commercially sensitive, however, he highlighted that it was anticipated that a developer would be selected in July, with a planning application for the whole site being approved by no later than April 2010.

Mr. Walker stated that it was important to target end users so as to make development sites attractive to developers. Public funded projects were progressing. The SSTC would develop the transport infrastructure so that at the end of the recession cycle businesses would benefit from better transport links and this would help economic recovery.

Councillor Peter Maddison stated that he was surprised to hear that Phase 2 marketing on the Farringdon Row site was on hold.

In response, Mr. Walker explained that developers had two problems. The first was in getting funding to progress the development and secondly, purchasers were not able to get funding as banks were not able to lend. Added to this was the fact that Farringdon Row was public land and therefore had to follow a long tendering process.

The Chairman enquired whether there was anything being done with the Homes and Communities Agency to secure money to kick start work.

Mr. Walker advised that discussions had commenced and they were trying to establish a headroom of funding available. The priorities were known and they were waiting to see what the Homes and Communities Agency said.

The Chairman stated that he was pleased to note the progress being made in relation to the Vaux site.

Mr. Keith Lowes, Head of Planning, pointed out, however, that the site still needed to be acquired before any development could progress.

Mr. Walker added that action was being taken in the meantime to put things in place for when development could proceed on the Vaux site.

Councillor Copeland enquired as to whether the arc would provide any grants to businesses in the Southwick area to improve the shop frontages.

Mr. Walker advised that Southwick did not lie within the boundary of the Sunderland arc area. However, there were grants available to buildings in the Sunnyside area, some of which were listed buildings, in order to bring back these buildings into use.

Councillor M. Dixon congratulated Mr. Walker on the work the arc had carried out in the Sunnyside area and asked for details on the further work to be undertaken in that area.

Mr. Walker advised that the plans included to develop more residential and commercial space. There was now a number of restaurants and bars in the Sunnyside area. Twelve new bars and restaurants had come into being in the last few months. He was keen to develop the east of Sunnyside. One way of doing this was to have something people needed to walk to. The arc was looking to develop the Tavistock area and Central area of the City also with a similar emphasis on residential development and they would be promoting this. Mr. Walker added that once people were living and working in the City, the vibrancy would be achieved.

Councillor D. Wilson suggested that a ferry service could act as a catalyst to Sunnyside as users would need to walk through the area to access the service.

Mr. Walker stated that the arc would be happy to help with this where possible, however, key to this would be the operational costs in providing a ferry service.

In response to Members' enquiries regarding private developments in the City which appeared to have stalled, Mr. Walker referred to the difficult economic climate at the moment and advised that the arc had had discussions with certain developers to see what could be done.

The Chairman, having thanked Mr. Walker for his presentation and attendance at the meeting, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the progress currently being made by the Sunderland arc be noted.

City Centre Management – Progress Report

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) advising that Ms. Louise Hardy, City Centre Manager, would be attending the meeting in order to update the Committee on her work, including the main objectives, the progress being made and plans for the future.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman introduced Ms. Hardy who proceeded to address the Committee. Ms. Hardy advised that she was attending the meeting in order to provide the Committee with an overview of the work being undertaken and to discuss some of the more operational schemes. She informed the Committee that a City Centre Business Plan was currently being finalised by the City Centre Management Steering Group with a view to it being adopted with a programme of delivery from May onwards.

The aims of the City Centre Management Scheme had been devised from discussions with key stakeholders both public and private sector and a number of significant pieces of research about how the City Centre was performing and the perceptions of the people who work, shop, live and visit Sunderland City Centre.

Ms. Hardy advised that the aims evolve around:-

- supporting businesses in the City Centre;
- boosting footfall and increasing dwell time e.g. events and promotions;
- marketing the City Centre as a great place to visit, work and do business;
- creating a shopping experience.

She stated that in order to support and deliver against these aims a number of actions were already being implemented. Engaging with local businesses in terms of determining local issues/concerns and offering support and advice was key and so she and her team attended the following business groups on a regular basis:-

Bridge Tenants;
Park Lane Traders;
Sunniside Marketing;
LMAPS – Safer Sunderland;
Pubwatch and Management Meetings;
Shopwatch Management Meetings;
Shopmobility.

Ms. Hardy stated that Sunniside was an example of an area doing very well. She referred the Committee to the introduction of the 10% card which provided a discount in any business displaying the 'Sunniside Card Accepted Here' sticker to users on production of the card.

In addition, Ms. Hardy stated that she regularly attended meetings of the City Centre Strategy Group, City Marketing Group and City Centre Events Planning to communicate business issues and priorities.

Ms. Hardy stressed the importance of networking with other towns and cities and advised that she also attended regional meetings of the Association of Town Centre Management where examples of good practice and ideas on discount schemes were shared and initiatives developed. She reported that a business newsletter was currently being created to keep City Centre businesses informed of events, promotions and developments. A Stakeholder Forum meeting was organised twice a year and all City Centre stakeholders invited to attend. The theme of the event changed to address key business issues and priorities at the time. The next Forum was planned for April 2009 with an agenda to address and suggest ways of surviving the current financial climate.

Ms. Hardy went on to inform that a number of key operational schemes had been developed to promote a safe, welcoming and friendly City Centre. These projects were being delivered in partnership with various agencies, including the Council, Police, Safer Sunderland Partnership and private sector businesses. They included Pubwatch, which was re-launched in October 2007 and enabled licensees to work in partnership and share information with the Police and other partners. There were currently 65 City Centre members. As a result of successfully re-launching Pubwatch a national high quality scheme was introduced to celebrate well managed and responsibly run licensed premises. This award is known as the 'Best Bar None' and was now operating in over 60 towns and cities across the Country.

Ms. Hardy advised that the Shopwatch Scheme had been re-launched in August 2008. It aimed to enable retailers to work in partnership and share information with the Police and other partners. There were currently 70 City Centre members. The scheme linked to a regional network and shared information on travelling criminals in an effort to reduce shoplifting.

Ms. Hardy informed the Committee of the polycarbonate glasses pilot for which she provided the lead for a five month City Centre initiative in partnership with the Safer Sunderland Partnership, the Police and Council Licensing Section. The initiative was introduced in mid September 2008 to ensure a safer City Centre by reducing the chance of injuries from glass. Five premises had taken part in the pilot. The cost of the pilot was shared on a 50-50 basis between the individual premises and the Safer Sunderland Partnership. The pilot scheme had been very successful with consumers, licensees and their staff and the Police. The Police had reported a 70% reduction in glass related incidents during the pilot period.

In relation to communications and promotions, Ms. Hardy advised Members that City Centre Management work in close partnership with all organisations that have a stake in Sunderland to market the City Centre as a great place to live, work, visit and do business. To help with this a website – www.sunderlandcitycentre.co.uk - was developed which includes business listings, promotions, events and attractions. The website also serves as a virtual forum for businesses which can log on securely to

find information relevant to them such as excluded persons, documents and updates on developments.

Ms. Hardy stated that a variety of events were being considered to attract people thereby increasing footfall and to encourage them to stay longer. She informed Members of the Yuletide Wishes event held on 16th November, 2008 which had been immensely popular and it was intended that this event would be repeated in November 2009. This was in addition to the Council's Christmas Programme. A City Centre magazine had also been produced around this time and circulated to tenants in the area. It was so popular with businesses that the possibility of producing two per year was being examined. The Yuletide Wishes Group had been recognised as the City Centre Events Group Sub Group to co-ordinate/oversee the whole City Centre Christmas 2009 programme.

Ms. Hardy informed the Committee that a Working Group had recently been established to investigate the possibility of hosting a regular market in the City Centre. This would complement the Jackie White's Market. Possible locations included Park Lane and the Winter Gardens. A specialist Italian market, largely food orientated, was scheduled for three days in July when, if it went well, would be repeated in November.

With reference to creating a shopping experience, Ms. Hardy stated that visitors expect a clean, safe, accessible environment where there is street art and entertainment. City Centres were competing with internet based shopping. Businesses were keen to see the shopping experience developed and as such different aspects of the environment were being considered, such as public realm improvements, some of which were planned in the Spring to tidy up and refresh the City Centre.

In an effort to address the perception and fear of crime, Ms. Hardy advised that a number of actions have been implemented in addition to Pubwatch and Shopwatch including organising specific meetings so that traders in a specified area can discuss the concerns directly with the Police Central Team. As a result of such meetings the Police profile has risen in the City Centre and they have been able to address some issues quickly. There had also been investment in roving CCTV cameras. In addition schemes such as the Taxi Marshalling Scheme for the night time economy was helping to make visitors and staff feel safer in the City and bring more people into the City Centre.

Finally, Ms. Hardy advised that a City Centre audit was currently being undertaken by the Council's Planning Section. The report would be looking at all aspects of the City Centre, including decluttering and the impact of business shutters. The report was due to be completed in early Spring 2009 and will be discussed by the City Centre Strategy Group to determine a programme of actions over the next few years.

The Chairman then opened the meeting up for questions.

Councillor M. Forbes raised the issue of the feasibility of having a market in the City Centre, bearing in mind the market rights held by South Tyneside to protect any rival market setting up within 6 and 2/3 miles of the Market Square.

Ms. Hardy advised that permission had been given for the three day Italian market, however, a feasibility study would need to be undertaken as to whether, in the light of the above Charter, the matter of having more permanent markets in the City Centre in the locations identified could be taken further.

Councillor Forbes commented that car parking in the City Centre was expensive and there was not much of it.

Ms. Hardy stated that there was a need to direct people to additional car parking, for example Sunnyside. The car parking charges were on a par with other cities. They were looking at promotions as a means to encourage people to come in the City Centre and knowledge of where the cars were coming from would assist with this.

Councillor Forbes referred to Fawcett Street stating that it was bypassed by everyone. It had been left to go to wrack and ruin and was a blight in the middle of the Bridges and Sunnyside.

Ms. Hardy commented that this was being addressed in the City Centre Strategy Group.

Councillor Forbes stated that it was important to have a diversity of offer in Sunderland. Bars, pubs and discos were catered for but there was no provision for dance classes for Salsa for example. It was important to cater for different clientele and she enquired whether there were any plans to widen the scope.

Ms. Hardy stated that there were no specific plans in relation to dance classes. However, thought had already been given to the day-time and night-time economy and consideration was now being given to the evening economy. She suggested that the activity may fall into this category.

Councillor Forbes enquired as to feedback in relation to the 10% discount card for Sunnyside.

Ms. Hardy advised that the discount card had only been launched in the middle of January for the Sunnyside area, however, they may be able to roll it out. Ten thousand cards had been produced initially and had been issued. A further five thousand were being produced. An analysis of the impact of the card would be undertaken but was not available at the present time as enough time had not elapsed in order to evaluate its effect.

Councillor Copeland referred to the empty shops in Fawcett Street and commented that other cities were using vacant premises to display paintings etc, whilst they were being marketed. She suggested that this might be something Sunderland could look at doing to alleviate the feeling of desolation that empty properties engendered. Councillor Copeland suggested that ways be looked into to bring empty properties back to life.

Councillor Copeland commented that people used to be able to window shop when the shops were closed but now due to the need to protect premises, shops were

fitted with shutters which were down when the shops were closed and prevented anyone viewing inside. It was very disconcerting and frightening, for example, to be waiting at bus shelters where lighting was poor and in the locations where there were empty buildings or where, due to the fear of crime, shop windows were covered by metal shutters. Fawcett Street, in particular, used to be the hub of the City and now shops were empty. Councillor Copeland enquired as to whether there were any grants available to financially assist businesses to put on 'nice' shutters.

Councillor Copeland went on to suggest, developing the idea put forward by Councillor Wilson of a ferry across the river, that a market along the banks of the River Wear would be a good idea as it would pick up the passing trade.

Ms. Hardy commented that using empty shops in the way described by Councillor Copeland would be a huge breakthrough, however, a lot of premises were privately owned and negotiations would need to take place. She added that there were very few grants, if any, available to support retailers. It was up to the landlord to invest in the premises and the issue would need to be identified by the City as a priority. With regard to Fawcett Street, Ms. Hardy was aware that an audit of street lighting was being undertaken and it was hoped that this would be picked up and addressed. As far as a market along the riverside was concerned, Ms. Hardy repeated the restrictions imposed by the South Tyneside Charter in respect of permanent markets and that an application could be made for a specialist market or occasional market. She added that the difficulty would be in attracting traders as they wanted to be located where the heaviest footfall was and establishing a market on the riverside would be speculative.

The Chairman enquired how the City Centre could be improved to make it more attractive to people in the early evening.

Ms. Hardy advised that they were looking at the impact of shutters. The aims and objectives of the evening economy had not been formulated yet. However, other cities such as Leeds, had pavement cafés which were supported by events. Having a market would be a prime example of this. There was no quick fix and there was a need to change consumer habits. Argos had ran a successful pilot which involved staying open later in the evening and the store had continued to do so as it had proved worthwhile for them, however, not many High Street names had followed.

The Chairman enquired whether the outcome of the City Centre audit would be submitted to the Review Committee.

Mr. Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment, confirmed that this would be submitted to the Review Committee.

Councillor M. Dixon referred to the new cinema development in Sunderland and commented that he was not convinced that it was working as he felt people were still frequenting the cinema at Boldon. He suggested that further marketing of the cinema in Sunderland needed to be carried out.

Ms. Hardy advised that a new marketing agency had been brought in to market the area which was part of Sunnyside and was looking to encourage the evening

economy. One method of doing this was by the use of marketing banners which would provide a visual attraction. Figures from the new bowling alley were promising and increasing steadily. The new manager of the cinema was keen to work with other businesses in the area which would provide an opportunity do a lot more and Ms. Hardy stated that she anticipated key changes in the area.

Mr. Lowes informed the Committee that planning consents had been agreed in the past for markets at the Fish Quay in Sunderland, however, they had not gone ahead due to the market rights held by South Tyneside. With regards to roller shutters, Mr. Lowes advised that businesses could not get insurance cover without them. He added that in Cardiff, the City Council had worked to remove the shutters and had paid the excess insurance premiums on behalf of those businesses.

Councillor D. Wilson agreed that Fawcett Street was dark and gloomy. In his opinion the climate was too cold for pavement cafés. He commented that the kind of public ashtrays provided in Sunderland City Centre was inappropriate and better ones were being used in other cities. The bus companies were cutting services and people needed bus services to enable them to get into the City Centre and get back. Councillor Wilson stated that more was needed for teenagers apart from the cinema and bowling to keep them out of mischief.

Ms. Hardy stated that the needs of teenagers were a large factor to be considered in relation to the evening economy and thought was being given as to providing something or somewhere else for them.

Councillor Copeland commented that the railway station was in a bad state; the escalator was never working, the station was filthy and the lift was not signposted.

Ms. Hardy advised that there was a programme of refurbishment for the station and the public realm improvements would take into account the Market Square.

Mr. Lowes added that the station was owned by Network Rail. Nexus was spending £7M on station improvements which were anticipated next year. Above ground level, discussions were taking place with the owners regarding the redevelopment of the station.

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked Ms. Hardy for her attendance and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report of the City Centre Manager be received and noted.

Reference from Cabinet 11th March, 2009 – Councillor Call for Action Guidance

The Chief Executive and City Solicitor submitted a joint report attaching a copy of the Cabinet report (copies circulated), providing information and draft guidance about new powers for Councillors designed to help them solve problems in their wards, which have now been implemented by the Government. The report was submitted

to the Review Committee seeking further comment from Members of the Review Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Rhiannon Hood, Assistant City Solicitor, advised the Committee that any Member could ask for a single ward issue to be brought to the Review Committee where other means of resolving the problem have been unsuccessful, such as at the frontline or at an Area Committee, and stated that the Review Committee meeting would be held in the community. Ms. Hood added that Kirklees Council had run a three year pilot on Councillor Call for Action and in that time there had been one issue in relation to community safety.

Ms. Hood added that a Members' Workshop would be held to provide training on the CCfA in late April, details of the arrangements would be forwarded to Members.

Councillor M. Forbes enquired whether CCfA covered an issue such as Fawcett Street, and whether the new powers had any 'teeth'.

Ms. Burnham stated that an issue such as Fawcett Street may warrant more significant investigation and benefit from all partners looking at the issue together. Ms. Burnham went on to say that the national guidance on the CCfA had been long awaited and was another tool to equip Elected Members to deal with issues. CCfA was intended to be used when all other avenues had been exhausted and on that basis, there should be very few.

Members agreed that Fawcett Street was a significant issue that they felt needed to be addressed and it was:-

4. RESOLVED that:-
 - i) the draft guidance relating to the CCfA be noted; and
 - ii) the condition of Fawcett Street be added to the Committee's Work Programme for the next municipal year.

Work Programme 2008-09

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which attached for Members' information a copy of the Committee's updated Work Programme for 2008-09.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor M. Dixon referred to the item on the Safer Sunderland Strategy scheduled for the April meeting and enquired whether racial tension in schools would be addressed in the report.

Mr. Jim Diamond advised that equality issues would be included in the above report and that he would liaise with Councillor Dixon in respect of the above matter.

5. RESOLVED that the information contained in the Work Programme be noted.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) J. SCOTT,
Chairman.