

At a meeting of the ECONOMIC PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held remotely on TUESDAY 6TH OCTOBER, 2020 at 4.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor D. Turner in the Chair

Councillors Blackburn, Blackett, M. Dixon, Fagan, Foster, Jackson, Jenkins, Marshall D. E. Snowdon, Taylor and Thornton

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

Ms Louise Sloan, Strategic Plans and Housing Manager

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

Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence submitted

Minutes of the Last Ordinary Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 8th September 2020

A copy of the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 8th September, 2020 was submitted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 8th September, 2020 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Reference from Cabinet – 15 September 2020 – Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's)

(A) Draft Homes in Multiple Occupation SPD

(B) Riverside Sunderland SPD

The Assistant Director of Law and Governance submitted a report (copy circulated) for the Committee to provide advice and consideration of the reports that were considered by Cabinet on 15 September 2020 which sought approval to undertake

public consultation on the Draft Homes in Multiple Occupation SPD and the Riverside Sunderland SPD.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Ms Louise Sloan, Strategy Plans and Housing Manager presented the report and was on hand to answer Member queries.

(A) Draft Homes in Multiple Occupation SPD

Councillor Jackson informed the Committee that one of the problems faced within her ward was residents having to report suspicious activity with alternations being made to large terraced houses that did not seem to have Planning permission and enquired if the Council had the capacity to enforce any legislation that comes through.

Ms Sloan advised that from a planning perspective they should be able to enforce this if they were breaching a planning application previously approved but it would depend on each individual property and if it was defined within a HMO/size of HMO.

In response to Councillor Blackburn's query that planning permission was only required for large HMO's in non article 4 areas, what was deemed to be a large HMO, Ms Sloan advised that between 3 and 6 people living in a house was considered to be large.

Councillor M. Dixon commented that one of the problems faced as Ward Members and on Planning Committees wasn't so much student accommodation but residential Care and queried if this sandwiched effect would apply to residential care homes or did this just apply to student accommodation, which seemed to be the theme of the report.

Ms Sloan advised that the report did mention students mainly as there were a number of students living across the city and the SPD would not deal specifically with residential care as this was a different use class. The sandwiching effect wouldn't apply in that instance.

Councillor M. Dixon suggested that the exercise be extended in this regard to include residential care homes as in his particular experience the issues around student accommodation were actually declining in these larger terraced houses due to the offer that's available within the City at locations such as Joplings, Pheonix House and the planning permission given for student accommodation to be used at the Forster Buildings. Councillor M. Dixon enquired if this sandwich effect could be extended to take into account a residential care home or for a home of asylum seekers for example.

Ms Sloan advised that they could absolutely have a look into this and come back once they had considered the issue in more detail.

The Chairman enquired if there was a right of appeal for people who were refused permission to establish a HMO, Ms Sloan advised that there was and this would be pursued through the regular mechanism of going through the planning inspectorate.

The Chairman referred to the map on page 25 of the agenda detailing where people wouldn't need planning permission and enquired if this meant that the Council would know where all HMO's were, even though they did not have to have planning permission.

Ms Sloan advised that they would have a record of permitted development and would also have a record from a licencing and also Council Tax point of view so they would maintain within their team a very comprehensive database to record and monitor where all HMO's were across the City. This would enable them to ensure if other ward areas got a significant number of HMO's over a period of time, they would look at what planning intervention they could do in that particular area.

Councillor Blackett advised that Millfield Ward had a particular number of HMO's and enquired if this would potentially push the problem into other wards and what measures were in place to stop this now rather than using Article 4.

Ms Sloan advised that at this stage, all they were able to do was monitor and if we got the data to support them doing an Article 4 in a particular area. If there was an increase in a particular area as the problem was moving elsewhere then the monitoring system should pick this up and we could move quickly to act and be able to consider what appropriate measures to put in place

Councillor Jackson queried what current or future powers we had in the managing of landlords and how they in turn managed the HMO properties. Ms Sloan advised that management plans were required when planning permission was applied for and as licensing colleagues dealt with this she would not like to provide an incorrect answer in this regard she would feed this back to colleagues.

(B) Riverside Sunderland SPD

Councillor M. Dixon commented that looking at the north side of the bridge and the two developments at Sheepfolds and Bonnersfield, if there was any priority in terms of timescale for these. Ms Sloan advised that it was felt Bonnersfield would come slightly behind all other developments in this point in time and the masterplan did not actually cover Bonnersfield but from a planning perspective they thought it was appropriate to include the site so that we got a comprehensive development of the area but it is very much seen as a latter part of the SPD.

Councillor M. Dixon enquired if the current uses/traders within the units at Sheepfolds would go, under the aspirations for the area. Ms Sloan advised that this would be down to the delivery strategy how this would be brought forward and that the SPD established what new uses we would consider to be appropriate for planning permissions but it doesn't say that businesses currently located there would need to close.

Councillor M. Dixon commented that this was heartening as he was concerned over the uncertainty for the existing businesses there.

In response to Councillor Foster's query over the number of footbridges proposed to the football stadium, Ms Sloan advised that the SPD did identify that two footbridges could come forward and identifies potential locations for them, this would be down to the delivery of the scheme itself and accessibility in linking the Riverside which was

the main aspiration of the document. Whether the two bridges could be achieved, remained to be seen.

The Chairman enquired as to how we could improve public transport and link up the area with the city centre. Ms Sloan informed that this was being looked at as part of a wider city centre strategy although the transport planners were continuing to consider the accessibility of the city centre. The aspirations of the SPD and the framework was to ensure that it was a low carbon, accessible location that people could live there without a car if they chose to do so.

In response to the Chairman's query over private coaches coming into the city and if they would use park lane or if there were other locations for them to utilise, Ms Sloan advised that short term there were no issues with them coming onto the site, as the site was developed there were other locations being considered across the city near the Empire Theatre for example could be one potential location.

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

2. RESOLVED that the Committee received and noted the report with all comments made to be passed on to Cabinet.

International Strategy – Overview and Progress Report

The Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide the Committee with an overview of the city's International Strategy and consider the nature and level of activity summarised in the 2019/20 annual report

(For copy report – see original minutes)

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

Councillor M. Dixon thanked Ms Auld and her Team for the report and all the hard work carried out and commented that he had been on this Committee since the strategy was started and over the years had asked the question about our links to the University and it seemed to him that these were good now and had been enhanced over the last few years.

Ms Auld commented that she believed our link had been strong from the very beginning but maybe there had been more practical projects ongoing at the moment such as the photography links.

Councillor M. Dixon enquired over publicity and if the team used more national newspaper/magazine outlets to publicise the City of Sunderland and if not was this worth considering once things improved in the current world situation.

Ms Auld advised that if it would depend slightly on the target and if it was a city promotion in terms of investment and attraction then our communications team would advertise in trade magazines and such like but it was worth looking at with

our Communications team at this further to see if there was more we could do in terms of getting these news stories out.

Councillor. M.Dixon commented that he was more thinking of paying papers to advertise Sunderland rather than a particular news story but he was sure Officers could look into that.

In response to Councillor. M. Dixon's enquiry, Ms Auld advised that there had not been a concerted effort to work more with countries such as Poland, Latvia and Serbia that had been mentioned in the report and these connections had been more about patterns of opportunity that had arose. Ms Auld also advised that efforts were being focussed on the current partnerships at the moment with the resources at our disposal it was important not to spread ourselves too thin. However, It was always worthwhile to keep a watching eye to see if there were opportunities to follow up upon should they arise.

In reply to Councillor M. Dixon, Ms Auld commented that she always felt they could do better, they have talked before about how they could work more closely with the University and their alumni, with them having the potential of almost being a feeder in terms of attracting businesses into the City and that's something with resource and time could be really interesting as a project.

Ms Auld felt we could do more in terms of engagement with the Department of International Trade and the trade missions that they organised and a stronger contingent in terms of Sunderland businesses proactively looking at that. It was very difficult for those businesses to look at something like this at present as they were dealing with the fallout from the Coronavirus and how that was impacting them.

The Chairman enquired what the major challenges were that we faced in the future and also what were the main opportunities for our City. Ms Auld commented that context was key in terms of both of those questions as we were currently going through the transition period of leaving the EU and we don't yet know what our scenario will be going forward and that uncertainty was quite challenging for our business community and potentially in terms of recruitment, where their staff were to come from.

Moving into a world, post Covid and post Brexit, the City has a lot of strengths and strong businesses with an opportunity for growth such as in the advanced manufacturing and digital sectors which had held up relatively well during Covid as people were relying more on technology so there was opportunity there for those businesses and it was important to be scanning and monitoring so that as soon as things became more clear, that we were supporting our businesses to take up what those opportunities were.

Having fully considered the report, the Chairman thanked Ms Auld for a comprehensive report and commented that it showed that a lot of hard work had been put in.

3. RESOLVED that the 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

Mr Diamond referred to the item on Road Safety report from last months meeting and suggested Members may be interested in having a visit to the Road Safety Interactive Action Centre in Newcastle, once it was safe to do so.

In response to Councillor Jackson's suggestion of looking at Hate Crime and incident reporting within the City and what could be done with regards to community engagement and the misinformation that was out there on issues such as Asylum seekers and refugees, Mr Diamond advised that there was an item on the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee's workplan in relation to Hate Crime and he would make further enquiries over the content for this and report back to Councillor Jackson.

4. 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 14th September, 2020 (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.

5. 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) D. TURNER,
Chairman.