

At a meeting of the ECONOMIC PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY 13TH JULY, 2021 at 4.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor D. Snowdon in the Chair

Councillors Ali, M. Dixon, Edgeworth, Fagan, Foster, Laws, Price, Taylor and Warne

Also in attendance:-

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

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

Mr Daniel Hattle, Regeneration Manager

Mr Mark Taylor, Principle Conservation Officer

Ms Rachel Grahame, Tyne and Wear Archaeology Officer

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

Apologies for Absence

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillors Greener and Thornton

Minutes of the Last Ordinary Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 13th April 2021

A copy of the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 13th April, 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 13th April, 2021 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest

Tyne and Wear Archaeology Service

The Assistant Director of Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) to update the Committee on the work of the Tyne and Wear Archaeological Team and archaeological work being undertaken in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Ms Rachel Grahame, Tyne and Wear Archaeology Officer, and Mr Mark Taylor, Principal Conservation Officer presented the report along with a PowerPoint presentation and were on hand to answer Members queries.

Councillor Foster enquired if Sunderland South had its own qualified archaeologist. Ms Grahame advised that they did not but that the same service was provided to all regions.

In response to Councillor Foster's query over the concerns Councillor D. Wilson had raised over the stones on Roker Beach, Ms Grahame advised that he had been in touch, but she was not directly involved with this. Mark Taylor, Principal Conservation Officer advised that they were working with officers to have these stones moved and the consideration of their relocation was ongoing.

Councillor Fagan referred to the land north of Burdon Lane and if the further investigation that was being carried was likely to see changes to the housing planned. Ms Grahame advised that there had already been some changes made to preserve the archaeology found and that it would be possible to have some interpretation boards placed as per Councillor Fagan's suggestion.

Councillor Dixon advised that he had received a question put forward by a ward resident who had referred to the portable antiquities service and felt that Sunderland was lagging behind in terms of finds and questioned how we could encourage people to report their discoveries.

Ms Grahame advised that Portable Antiquities did outreach work with groups and individual detectorists but as it was a voluntary scheme they were dependant on those people approaching them with their finds. But in terms of figures it may be that there was just not as much metal detecting going on in Sunderland also.

In relation to Councillor Dixon's query as to if there were any advice/models to follow on encouraging people to take up metal detecting/reporting their finds, Ms Grahame advised that she would speak with portable antiquities on this. Daniel Hattle, Regeneration Manager advised that he would liaise with the Council's Corporate Communications to see how they could promote this also.

Councillor Ali referred to the earlier presentation in which it was advised one of the Search Toolbars was not working on the website and requested if a notice could be placed on this so that users were made aware to use the advanced search.

Councillor Laws suggested that this be rectified in a joined up approach before any promotion was made to the site. Ms Grahame advised that she would try her best and ICT Newcastle were trying to fix the underlying issues but investigations had taken over a year to look at the mapping system problems.

In response to Councillor Dixon's query, Ms Grahame advised that they were careful about some sites with regard to privacy. Part of their function was to provide data to the public freely but there was certain conditions where a vagueness of locations may be required and whilst they tried not to keep details secret if there was a valuable find, discretion was given until this had been through all the necessary processes.

Councillor Edgeworth queried that as the service covered 5 authorities, if under current cost pressures, there was anything that they had stopped providing that they previously used to do. Ms Grahame advised that they were slightly more stretched now and whilst she had only been in post since 2019, previous colleagues would advise that they spent less time than they'd like to on public engagement such as lectures, talks and guided tours. Something that they would like to see an increase in.

In response to Councillor Edgeworth, Ms Grahame advised that they certainly could provide help with regards to information boards on footpaths at Hastings Hill.

The Chairman queried if the service worked closely with the Antiquarian Society. Ms Grahame advised that they have had contact with the society but did not work closely with them.

In relation to the Chairman's query, Ms Grahame advised that the service hoped not to hold up any significant planning proposals as they worked with the Planning Authorities to try and avoid this but she would liaise with her colleague to see if there had been any sites or finds where this has been the case in the past.

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

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

Annual Work Programme 2021-22

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 2021/2022

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer presented the report for Members information

The Chairman advised that there had been a request from Councillor Laws for consideration of an item relation to Fatfield Riverside and asked if there could be some clarification on this.

Councillor Laws commented that he believed this area in Washington was under utilised and there was a great deal of opportunity in terms of economic prosperity in the area and an opportunity to expand/invest in. The Chairman requested that Mr Diamond liaise with Catherine Auld to see what plans there were for the area.

The Chairman informed the Committee of the need for Members to express their interest in attending the Sunnyside Development Task and Finish Group. It was agreed that all Members who wished to express an interest contact Mr Diamond and membership would not just be limited to one Member per political party.

Councillor Ali commented that he wished to congratulate Councillors and Officers in obtaining the funding for the new train station and suggested that we needed to resolve the issues in the surrounding area before this came to fruition.

Councillor Edgeworth commented that individuals and businesses were contributing great deals of their own money into the area so it would be good if we could reach out to those as part of the working group also.

Councillor Dixon suggested that the Task and Finish Group should also provide a written report so that there was an end product from the Members involved.

Councillor Fagan referred to the Environmental Services report due to come before the Committee in February and enquired if this could be brought forward on the work programme. The Chairman commented that he had raised this previously and spoken with Ms Michelle Coates who had advised that as the Team were relatively new it was requested that staff be bedded in before it came to Committee to allow a true reflection of the service. Therefore the Chairman suggested that this be something they kept a close eye on and move forward if necessary.

Councillor Taylor suggested that Ms Coates bring two reports, one sooner, then a further progress report updating once the new team had been embedded as this was a very emotive issue at present. The Chairman asked that Mr Diamond approach Ms Coates to see if this could be done.

In relation to Councillor Dixons enquiry, Mr Diamond advised that he would request that the Sunderland Chamber of Commerce be invited to the November meeting along with the representative from North East Chamber of Commerce as had happened at last years meeting.

In response to Councillor Warne, Mr Diamond advised that the Housing Strategy was due to come before Committee at February meeting where Gentoo would also be invited.

3. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme for 2021-2022 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 June, 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.

Councillor Edgeworth referred to the Key Cities funding and requested more info on the plans for Holmeside rationalisation. Mr Diamond advised that Peter McIntyre was due to attend the Committee in February and would ask that this information be included within that update.

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) D. SNOWDON,
Chairman.