

GROWING THE ECONOMY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 6 NOVEMBER 2019

PRESENT:- Councillors Emma Faramarzi (Chair), Mark Dempsey, Jenny Jefferies, James Robbins, Imtiyaz Shaikh and Rahul Tarar

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nick Burns-Howell, Paul Dixon and Roger Smith.

16. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

17. Public Question Time

No public questions were received during the meeting.

18. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 18th September 2019, be confirmed and signed.

19. Business Engagement

The Chair welcomed Mr James Lockhart a partner at Whitmarsh Lockhart, Chartered Surveyors and Commercial Property Agents, who had agreed to attend the Committee to provide some insight to the business environment in Swindon.

Mr Lockhart thanked the Committee for the invitation to address them. He outlined his history of working in Swindon since 1980 at Whitmarsh Lockhart, Chartered Surveyors and explained that he was a member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and an accredited expert witness. Mr Lockhart raised the following points and responded to Members questions in respect of:

- The vibrancy of Swindon as a town and its ability to adapt to market conditions.
- The Swindon warehouse sector which in 2018 took up approximately 671,000sq feet of space with around 700,000sq feet in the first two quarters of this year.
- The current national and international industrial and commercial markets and the need for Swindon to identify employment land to match the enquiries received for development.
- The boom of activity in Swindon in the 1980's following the country's entry into the European Community with a number of major manufacturers arriving in the town, including Honda in the late 80's; and the slowdown in commercial growth in the 1990's.
- The average life cycle of a major company moving into the town of approximately 35 years before they tended to move for various reasons.

- The need to constantly refresh employers within the town to maintain the economic structure of the town.
- That companies interested in locating to Swindon would also naturally also consider Milton Keynes (who have a large promotional budget), Northampton and Peterborough.
- Swindon still have an advantage over its natural rivals due to its proximity to Heathrow Airport and access to the west end of London but needed land availability, especially with a number of commercial properties being converted to housing.
- The need for UK banks to support the development of commercial land.
- The opportunity for the development of brownfield sites which became commercially less attractive if there were any complications or constraints with its redevelopment.
- The development model for Swindon in the 1980's whereby the Council would buy land, gain planning permission, put infrastructure in place and then sell freehold plots of that land to companies for development.
- The need for feedback from companies who decided to leave Swindon and the work of the Council's Business Retention Service.
- Current resources, both financially and staffing, within the Council for attracting new businesses to the town.
- The complex needs of new business, for instance, high quality internet provision.
- The move of Swindon towards becoming a logistics centre.
- The future of the current Honda site after the company left Swindon.
- The fluidity of the office based market and the effect this would have on the demand for office accommodation and future car parking provision/requirements.

Resolved – That Mr James Lockhart be thanked for his attendance and presentation to the Committee.

20. Town Centre Public Space Protection Order

The Director of Housing and Communities and Head of Public Protection, Planning and Culture submitted a joint report reviewing the town centre Public Space Protection Order and enforcement activities. Following a presentation of the report the Cabinet Member for Economy and Place and Locality Lead Public Health responded to Members' questions and points in respect of:

- The main issues requiring enforcement officers to speak to up to 100 members of the public each week.
- The outcome of six injunction orders sought against persistent street drinkers in the town centre area.
- The placement and prominence of signage advising cyclists of restrictions on cycling in the town centre.
- The use of mobile signage highlighting cycling the restrictions in the town centre.
- The proactive nature of Council and Police Officers staff in positively engaging the public within the town centre.
- The use of CCTV to identify anti-social behaviour in the town centre and to direct staff to address these issues.

- The use of bodycams by In-Swindon and Police Officers in the town centre.

Resolved – That the report and enforcement activities in respect of the town centre Public Space Protection Order be noted.

21. Kimmerfields Update

The Committee considered the draft Swindon Town Centre Vision and in particular the Kimmerfields Development.

Resolved – That the update be noted and the Cabinet Member for the town Centre be thanked for his attendance at the meeting.

22. Cultural Quarter Update

The Head of Town Centre Development submitted a report updating Members on progress with the Cultural Quarter project. The Cabinet Member for the Town Centre responded to Members comments and questions in respect of the following issues:

- The Art Gallery and Museum Strategy as reported to Cabinet in March 2019.
- The future of the Wyvern Theatre and options for its future development. How this could be combined with the proposed art gallery and museum and associated facilities to make a sustainable facility in the theatre square area.
- Ways in which any newly developed theatre could be made more commercially viable.
- The business case for options for financing the proposed cultural quarter.
- The future of the civic offices campus site and whether this could be incorporated in the new theatre/museum facility.
- Initial conversations with interested parties regarding the creation of a cultural quarter.
- The commissioning of an impact assessment for options for the cultural quarter and timetable for a decision on any proposal and development.
- Whether there was scope to include educational facilities as part of any proposed development.

Resolved – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Cabinet Member for the Town Centre and Cabinet Member for Economy and Place be thanked for their presentation and answers to Members' questions.

23. Honda Task Group Update

The Committee received an update on current work being progressed by Honda Task Groups.

24. Work Programme 2019/20

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Legal Officer setting out the Committee's proposed Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2019/20.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

