

ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 1 SEPTEMBER 2011

PRESENT:- Councillors Peter Heaton-Jones (Chair), Mark Dempsey (Vice-Chair), Junab Ali, Mike Bawden, Sinead Darker, Emma Faramarzi, Richard Hurley, Stan Pajak, Anthony Peake, Vera Tomlinson and Steve Wakefield.

Councillors Garry Perkins and Nick Martin were also in attendance.

9. **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.

10. **Public Question Time**

The following questions were asked in accordance with Standing Order 28.

Questioner

Mr. Roy Townsend.

With the closure of Fleming Way from east to west, what route will emergency services take to Westcott Place?

Response

The Chair advised that a written response would be provided to Mr. Townsend.

Questioner

Mr. Tim French.

Is there any update on the demolition of the College site?

Response

Councillor Garry Perkins, Deputy Leader of the Council, responded that he had met with the developers last week and that bats were currently roosting in the building. As bats were a protected species, they would have to be moved carefully before the building could be demolished and it was hoped that this would happen by the end of this year.

11. **Minutes**

Resolved – That, subject to the inclusion of comments made by James Lockhart (GWE Business West) that the Planning Department could be more proactive in supporting regeneration projects, the minutes of the meeting held on 11 August 2011, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Matters Arising

Agenda item 7 (3) - The Chair advised that there had been a delay in the preparation of a briefing paper on the Mechanics Institute and added that further information had been requested from Officers.

12. Town Centre Regeneration Review - Experiences of other Towns and Cities

The Chair welcomed Mr. Chris Oldershaw, Chief Executive of the Urban Regeneration Project in Gloucester, to the meeting and explained that the purpose of this item was to discuss regeneration with representatives from other towns in order to finalise the Committee's Town Centre Regeneration report. He advised that representatives from Bath and Bristol, whilst initially agreeing to attend the meeting, had later given their apologies. The Chair and Members of the Committee expressed their disappointment over this and agreed that the Committee's concerns should be forwarded to the Chair of Scrutiny for investigation. Councillor Stan Pajak also agreed to contact his Liberal Democrat colleagues in Bath and Bristol to find out if their Officers would be willing to attend a future meeting or whether Members of this Committee could visit them to find out more about their regeneration projects.

Mr. Oldershaw was invited to give some background information on the Urban Regeneration Project in Gloucester. He explained that there had been a strong focus on heritage as there were a number of listed buildings in Gloucester and that there had been an initial investment of £25M from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and £25M from the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) to be invested over 6 years. A 10 year plan was developed and 7 sites, known as the "magnificent seven", were initially targeted. There were 'early wins' in two areas, the College re-location and Gloucester Quays and this helped to build up investor confidence in the area.

The Urban Regeneration Project Board comprised 25 Directors, with a mix of backgrounds and skills along with a strong Chair. A residents' forum, a business forum and a youth forum had been established and met before each Board meeting, for their views to be reported directly to the Board. Mr Oldershaw added that he had also taken on the role of Chief Executive of Marketing Gloucester, whose purpose it was to sell the project to local people and to change people's perceptions of Gloucester.

Recently, the situation had changed as the HCA and the SWRDA withdrew their support and the project was now a Council owned company with the responsibilities and priorities set out in a management contract between Gloucester City Council and the company.

Following questions from Members of the Committee, Mr. Oldershaw provided further information on the following issues:-

- Additional funding was provided through the RDA to upgrade the route from Gloucester Quays to the city centre and a robust economic case had been put forward providing evidence on how links to the Quays would benefit the town centre.
- The importance of having a long term plan was emphasised as it was essential that developers had certainty about the future, as regeneration was a long term process. The heritage side was promoted strongly and Gloucester had been fortunate that the College relocation played a major role initially as this enabled potential developers to see that things were happening and were therefore more likely to invest.
- There was need to maintain momentum of regeneration, even within the

recession, as it was important to show developers that progress had not ceased.

- The best ambassadors for promoting towns were local people. This included local taxi drivers. The Editor of the local paper was also on the Board and worked very well in assisting to promote the town.
- A Design Review Panel was established about 5 years ago to consider all designs and to ensure that the ambience of the area was retained and there was no compromise on design quality.
- About 70% of space had been let in Gloucester Quays and there was a good mix of retailers. There was a need to increase 'dwell time' and this could be achieved through more restaurants.
- Marketing Gloucester had a budget of £200K of which about £40K was spent on tourism and £40K on general marketing.

Resolved – (1) That Mr. Oldershaw be thanked for attending the meeting and for providing Members of the Committee with detailed information relating to the Urban Regeneration Project in Gloucester.

(2) That the concerns of the Committee relating to the non-attendance of representatives from Bath and Bristol to this meeting be passed onto the Chair of Scrutiny for investigation.

(3) That Councillor Stan Pajak contact his Liberal Democrat colleagues in Bath and Bristol to find out if their Officers could attend a future meeting or whether Members of the Committee could visit their regeneration projects.

13. Town Centre Regeneration Review - Update on Regeneration Projects across the Borough

The Committee received an update on regeneration projects across the Borough from Councillor Garry Perkins, Deputy Leader of the Council and Mr. Ian Piper and Mr. Chris Hitchings from Forward Swindon.

Mr. Piper confirmed that Forward Swindon were in the process of developing a master plan for the town centre that would outline a clear vision and clear set of priorities over the next 10 – 15 years and it was hoped that this would be in place by Spring 2012. The process, known as 'enquiry by design' actively engaged people in developing the plan and consultants would be used to ensure that this process was properly facilitated and that visions and ideas were translated into a viable master plan within a set framework. He confirmed that there would be a period of public consultation to ensure that local people believed in the plan. A brief had been developed and it was agreed that this would be circulated to Members of this Committee.

In response to a query from Councillor Dempsey, Mr. Piper confirmed that Swindon did not yet have residents and business forums established who could feed into this master plan but that he would discuss with his colleagues as to how this could be taken forward.

Councillor Perkins added that a Town Centre Events Co-ordinator had now been employed with the intention of holding events in the Town Centre every weekend. In response to questions from Councillor Tomlinson, Councillor Perkins commented that shopping satellite areas brought the town together and that there were shops that were better located outside of the town centre due to logistics and access, such as furniture shops. He added that the town centre was attracting high quality shops but there was still a need to attract good quality restaurants into the town. Mr. Piper confirmed that a condition of the development at Union Square was

for smaller, individual, high quality retailers to be located in this area.

With regards to the provision of a new multi-storey car park, Councillor Perkins reported that a review was currently taking place on car parks and that many of them were 40+ years old. The Council would take out an investment loan to build this new car park, allowing other car parks to be re-developed for alternative uses.

Mr. Hitchings confirmed that Whalebridge was the first part of the infrastructure on Union Square, therefore it was very important to the development and Muse were committed to the scheme, having spent around £1M on the development. The funding for the scheme itself came from a £2M grant from the Homes and Community Agency and £2M from the South West Regional Development Agency. Public consultation had taken place and comments taken on board to ensure that there continued to be a sense of civic pride within the town.

Mr. Piper confirmed that Old Town and Victoria Road would be included within the brief for the master plan and that Ward Councillors would be involved in the development of the plan. Following a comment from Councillor Faramarzi regarding the location of pubs in one area of Fleet Street, Councillor Perkins confirmed that there would be an opportunity to look at this as part of the town centre regeneration.

The Chair asked about the possibility of placing publicity leaflets on train seats and of having a room or a shop front to bring people to in order to provide them with information about Swindon. Mr. Piper reported that consideration was being given to providing a point of contact off the main transport routes into Swindon in order to meet and greet people and to take them on from there. The marketing budget was around £100K and work was being undertaken to try and obtain funding from the private sector for this purpose also.

Resolved – That Councillor Garry Perkins, Mr. Ian Piper and Mr. Chris Hitchings be thanked for attending the meeting and for providing information to the Committee on regeneration projects across the Borough.

14. Waste and Recycling

Councillor Nick Martin (Cabinet Member for Streetsmart and Parks), Ms. Jackie Moyles (Head of Streetsmart) and Mr. Richard Fisher (Head of Wastes Management) attended the meeting to discuss the issue of waste and recycling in order for the Committee to decide whether they wished to pursue this topic as part of their work programme for 2011/2012.

Ms. Moyles briefly outlined the services currently offered and reported that the 50% recycling target had been reached in March 2010. There were issues around landfill tax as this increased by £8 per tonne every year and the current landfill arrangements would cease in 2016 so alternatives were currently being considered. The Council was committed to purchasing a waste to energy plant as this was contained within the existing waste strategy. A recent procurement exercise had ceased as value for money had proved unachievable and Officers were now looking at other opportunities.

Collection of food waste was being considered, although there were no local facilities where food waste could be taken to and there would be a revenue impact as this would have to be a weekly collection. There were a number of areas that Members of the Committee were keen for further information on, including:-

- Statistics – how much waste was generated through the Borough and was there the capacity to sustain the 53% recycling target in the future?
- What the future holds when the landfill arrangements cease in 2016,

including a breakdown of the options and costs of the various technologies being considered for future waste management. What involvement could this Committee, Members, and the public have in this process?

- Waste to Energy – what was the current position and plans for the future?
- Food waste – how this was to be dealt with in the future?
- What research is undertaken to identify poor/good performing areas – where are these areas and what is done to improve poorly performing areas?
- What promotions have taken place or will take place in the future for example in relation to composting.

Resolved - (1) That Officers provide further information on waste and recycling as requested by Members of the Committee to the Chair prior to the next meeting.

(2) That Councillor Martin, Ms. Jackie Moyles and Mr. Richard Fisher be thanked for attending the meeting and responding to questions from Members of the Committee.

15.

Reference from Council

The Committee considered the following referral made at Full Council on 21st July 2011:-

“The Council congratulates SCS for its cooperation with Councillors and concerned citizens when they take direct action to remove spoil from public and private land that endangers health and blights the environment.

This Council requests the Economic, Environmental and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Committee to set up a task group to specifically look at the problem of un-adopted back alleys and report back on what action the Council can take to work with residents to facilitate positive and sustainable change.”

Resolved – (1) That a task group, comprising Councillors Pajak and Wakefield be established to consider the problem of un-adopted back alleys and that expressions of interest be sought from other Members of the Committee wishing to participate in this task group.