

ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 23 OCTOBER 2012

PRESENT:- Councillors Peter Heaton-Jones (Chair), Mark Dempsey (Vice-Chair), Junab Ali, Mike Bawden, Wayne Crabbe, Toby Elliott, Emma Faramarzi, Mary Friend, Richard Hurley, Julian Price, James Robbins and Steve Wakefield

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nicky Sewell.

15. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. Councillor Toby Elliott made a non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of Agenda Item No. 5 in his capacity as an owner of a Town Centre business.

Councillor Emma Faramarzi made a non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of Agenda Item No. 5 in her capacity as Chair of the Federation of Small Businesses and as a member of the Influence Board (formerly Swindon Strategic Economic Partnership).

16. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 26th September 2012, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Matters Arising

Town Centre Master Plan - Councillor Crabbe commented that there had been an in-depth discussion at this meeting about the problems in the town centre, particularly in relation to the lack of policing and the fact that many people would prefer not to visit this part of the town. He felt that these comments were not reflected in the minutes. The Chair advised that all the comments made by Members of the Committee, including those made by Councillor Crabbe, in relation to the Town Centre master plan had been collated and formally submitted as this Committee's contribution to the consultation process.

Mechanics Report – the final draft of the report was tabled at the meeting. The Chair advised that the main revision had been the inclusion of more specific targets and timescales. It was agreed, following a request from Councillor Bob Wright that the Theatres Trust be added to Section 3 (Recommendations and Conclusions of the Advisory Group to Cabinet), under bullet point 5 to now read:

*“Requests the lead member together with the Mechanics Advisory Group and/or relevant officers to seek urgent meetings with and invite proposals from other partners including the Mechanics Institution Trust, Network Rail, the Science Museum, **the Theatre Trust** and the National Trust and provide a report by 31 December 2012 latest.”*

The Chair thanked Councillors Dempsey, Bawden and Wright for their contributions

and advised that the final report would be submitted to Cabinet.

17. Public Question Time

No public questions were received during the meeting.

18. An Economic Strategy for Swindon

The Committee considered the draft Economic Strategy which would form an important part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan and was submitted to this Committee as part of the consultation process.

Paddy Bradley (Head of Commissioning, Economy and Attainment) explained that six priorities had been identified following an in-depth analysis undertaken by consultants and that comments from Committee Members were welcome on the vision, priorities and milestones and whether these were ambitious enough. Stakeholders included political leaders, Influence, key businesses such as Nationwide, Intel and Honda, the Federation of Small Businesses, Chamber of Commerce and a range of providers.

The Committee noted that all parties broadly supported the Strategy and there was very little opposition to the document from Cabinet. Councillor Dempsey asked what measures were included within the plan in order to identify successes. Mr. Bradley responded that the Strategy was written in tandem with the Local Plan and the Corporate Strategy and that more detailed measures were contained within these documents. In response to a comment from Councillor Wayne Crabbe regarding the use of hydrogen or electric cars in the future and the possible need for a change to the planning process, Councillor Dale Heenan stated that a future cities bid had been submitted that would consider all environmental and technical issues and that he would welcome any comments on this.

Councillor Wayne Crabbe commented on the need for an employment led strategy rather than a housing led strategy and that access to employment land, such as that at Wichelstowe, would need to be considered. He added that consideration should also be given to the public realm around industrial estates as these were currently in poor condition and therefore created a poor image for potential investors. Mr. Bradley confirmed that these issues were being discussed and considered and added that the data used was based on the census data from April 2011 but that the data would be updated throughout the life of the strategy.

Councillor James Robbins asked how higher education fees had attracted more people into the town. Mr. Bradley responded that Swindon had a market for higher education in that existing businesses were now focussing upon training their existing staff. He added that a range of options were being considered and that a future ambition was to have a higher education facility in Swindon.

In response to a query from Councillor Julian Price, Mr. Bradley commented that one of the roles of Forward Swindon was to help and retain existing businesses. The strategy also contained details on enterprise zones, focussing upon creating conditions for new businesses. Councillor Mike Bawden commented that Swindon did not have enough suitable land for development but that there was a need to remain competitive within the current climate. He added that there was no reference to housing within the strategy and that he felt that housing and jobs should go hand in hand and that the document did not do enough to sell Swindon to potential investors. Mr. Bradley responded that the strategy was not intended as a marketing tool but that he would pass these comments on to Forward Swindon whose role it was to market Swindon to potential businesses.

Councillor Toby Elliott asked how many businesses had been consulted on the strategy. Mr. Bradley responded that the strategy was now being consulted upon and that various networks were being used including the Council website, Influence and other business networks. Benchmarking data had also been used, including an analysis of business rates that showed Swindon was competitive on this issue and that the transport infrastructure, whilst being summarised within the document, was still considered to be a very important element to getting people into Swindon.

In response to a query regarding career advice for younger people from Councillor Mary Friend, a separate piece of work was about raising participation in the learning strategy and the need for schools and employers to work together to provide this advice.

Resolved – (1) That Members of the Economic, Environmental and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the draft Economic Strategy.

(2) That the comments from Members of this Committee on the draft Economic Strategy be collated and submitted to the Cabinet.

19. Great Western Works Task Group

It was agreed, following a proposal by Councillor Steve Wakefield, that a task group be established to consider the 175th anniversary of the opening of Great Western Works in 2016.