

ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 4 APRIL 2013

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, Nicky Sewell and Steve Wakefield

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors .

29. 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 Cindy Matthews made a non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of Agenda Item No. 5 in her capacity as a member of the Swindon Allotment and Leisure Gardens Association (SALGA).

30. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2013, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

31. Public Question Time

No public questions were received during the meeting.

32. Allotments: Future Self-Management

Councillor Fionuala Foley (Cabinet Member for Streetsmart and Corporate Services) and Richard Fisher (Streetsmart Service Delivery Manager) presented a report outlining proposals for the future management of Allotments, following a motion at Full Council on 20th September 2012 which stated that the Swindon Allotment and Leisure Gardens Association (SALGA) had expressed an interest in taking on the self-management of Swindon Borough Council's Allotments in June 2012.

A consultation exercise was carried out with allotment holders and 12 responses were received, of which 6 were in favour of self-management, 4 were against and 2 were undecided or had reservations. Following this consultation process, a number of options were taken into account and the preferred option presented to the Committee was to have a single body to administer and manage the allotments. Members of the Committee, however, felt that the response rate to the consultation had been very low and therefore the case for self-management had not been made. Feedback from the Allotment Forum meetings indicated that allotment holders were not happy with the current day to day support from the Council and Mr. Fisher added that it was difficult to support the infrastructure in competition with the other services provided by Streetsmart.

Councillor Foley added that SALGA had indicated an interest a few years ago but had recently lost a number of their committee members and were therefore not in such a strong position to take on the self-management of Allotments. Issues

and ideas raised by Members of the Committee included:-

- Explore the idea of a pilot in, say, Pickards Field;
- Allow the Charity sector to tender for it, for example, Leaves;
- Extend the consultation process and include this as part of the Big Conversation;
- Informing allotment holders, at the time of purchase, what services the fees did and did not cover;
- The reality of expecting an individual organisation to run the Allotments service for £12K;
- This was a statutory service and the Council subsidises the service by £48K;
- Whilst there was a waiting list, it was for specific plots and some had remained vacant for a while. Councillor Foley agreed to publicise these vacant plots in the Members Bulletin;
- This was not a high priority for the Streetsmart Team and had not been raised as a major issue.

The Committee agreed that it was necessary for further work to be undertaken on the report and that the above issues should be considered before being able to make a recommendation to Cabinet.

Resolved – That Members of the Environmental, Economic and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Committee request further information to be provided to them in order to make a recommendation to Cabinet on the future self-management of Allotments.

33. Mechanics Advisory Group Update

The Chair updated Members of the Committee on the progress of the Mechanics Advisory Group since the last update given in December 2012. Following the recommendation of Cabinet that the Mechanics Advisory Group report should be referred to the Swindon Heritage Board for its consideration, a meeting had been held, and agreement reached, that the Mechanics Advisory Group and the Swindon Heritage Board should work together in order to consider the recommendations fully.

Councillor Mark Dempsey added that the Mechanics' Institution Trust were also represented at this working group and, at a recent meeting, following a presentation from a representative from the Heritage Lottery Fund, members were keen to work towards preparing a bid to undertake restoration work on the Mechanics Institute. There were two types of bid available and it was likely that a standard bid of between £2 – 5M would be submitted although it was anticipated that approximately 10% of the total cost would have to be found elsewhere. Funding would also be subject to ensuring that a long term sustainable solution be identified for the building. Members of the Committee acknowledged that progress was being made and requested that update reports be submitted to this Committee.

Resolved – (1) That Members of the Economic, Environmental and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Committee note and welcome the progress made by the Mechanics Advisory Group.

(2) That progress reports continue to be submitted to the Economic, Environmental and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

34. 175 Task Group Update

The Chair gave a brief overview of the progress made by the Swindon 175 Task Group that was established by this Committee to consider the celebrations of the 175th anniversary of the Great Western Works in 2016. He added that the role of the Task Group was to focus upon the economic benefits to Swindon and to support organised events, such as a Royal visit, an educational programme and the development of a link with Shildon.

The Members of the Task Group included Councillors Peter Heaton-Jones (Chair), Steve Wakefield, Mike Bawden, James Robbins and Junab Ali and representatives from other organisations and individuals would be actively encouraged to participate in the Task Group. Two meetings had already been held and the minutes of these meetings were attached to the report for information. Members of the Committee noted the progress of the Task Group and congratulated them on their achievements to date, adding that this would be a focal point for celebrating Swindon's Heritage.

Resolved – That Members of the Economic, Environmental and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Committee note and welcome the progress made by the 175 Task Group.

35. Inward Investment

Members of the Committee considered the Inward Investment report that contained information and evidence taken from a number of stakeholders during the Committee's review of Inward Investment that commenced in June 2011. The Chair asked Members of the Committee whether they wished to include any recommendations within the final report or whether it should remain as a live document with updates provided as and when appropriate. Issues raised by Members of the Committee included:-

- The need for cross party support;
- Any recommendations to reflect positively on Swindon;
- The need for updated information and data;
- Information around the electrification of the main railway line and its impact upon Inward Investment to be included within the report;
- Future updates to be reported to this Committee as not reported anywhere else;
- Issues around traffic and congestion within the town to be included within the report;
- The need to continue to work with businesses and partners to encourage Inward Investment into Swindon;
- This continues to be an ongoing process.

The Chair concluded that it would be necessary to submit the report to Cabinet and that he would work with the Vice-Chair and the Lead Member to finalise the report. The Committee also agreed that this would be an on-going process and future updates would be submitted to this Committee.

Resolved – (1) That the Chair, Vice-Chair and Lead Member finalise the Inward Investment report for submission to Cabinet.

(2) That further progress updates relating to Inward Investment be submitted to the Economic, Environmental and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

