

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD ON 21 NOVEMBER 2016 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.45 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Philip Mirfin (Chairman), Michael Firmager (Vice-Chairman), Chris Bowring, Ken Miall, David Sleight, Bill Soane, Shahid Younis and Lindsay Ferris

**Other Councillors Present**

Councillors: Mark Ashwell

**Officers Present**

Neil Carr (Principal Democratic Services Officer), Bernie Pich (Head of Town Centre Regeneration), Alex Deans (Head of Highways and Transport) and Jude Whyte (Service Manager, Neighbourhood Housing) and Deana Humphries (Housing Manager, General Needs).

**17. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted by Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey. Lindsay Ferris attended as a substitute.

**18. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 5 September 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**20. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

**21. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

**22. WOKINGHAM TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION**

The Committee considered a report, Agenda pages 11 to 60, which provided an update on the regeneration of Wokingham town centre. Councillor Mark Ashwell, Executive Member for Planning and Regeneration and Bernie Pich, Head of Town Centre Regeneration attended the meeting to answer Member questions.

Members were reminded that the previous update on the town centre regeneration project had been submitted to the Committee at its meeting on 18 October 2015. At that meeting there had been a challenge to the proposed consideration of financial information as a Part II item. Members were advised of the subsequent legal advice provided to the Council in relation to this issue. Financial information had been subsequently provided on the Council website and was included in the latest update report with no requirement to exclude the public from the discussion.

The update report reminded Members of the background to the current town centre regeneration plans, starting with the development of the Core Strategy (Local Plan) in 2004. The report gave details of the consultation exercises and expert reports which had

identified Wokingham town centre as a key retail and leisure growth location. This reflected the development of 4,000 new homes adjacent to the town centre and Wokingham's classification as an important sub-regional centre.

The report gave details of the Wokingham Town Centre Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which had been adopted in 2010 following extensive public consultation. The Masterplan described the range of infrastructure to be delivered in the town centre, including leisure, residential, highways, parking, public transport and retail. The Council's regeneration scheme involved four priority projects in line with sites identified in the Masterplan.

The priority projects were designed to achieve the agreed objectives for regeneration and the benefits arising from the Council delivering regeneration directly. The four projects were summarised as:

- Peach Place Refurbishment – now completed, which saw a major façade refurbishment of the Rose Street/Market Place corner;
- Peach Place Redevelopment – which would see the creation of new retail/leisure units facing out onto Peach Street and onto a new public square facing onto Rose Street – work scheduled to commence in January 2017;
- Elms Field and the Paddocks – which would see the creation of new retail/leisure units, food store, hotel, cinema, new road and residential units framing an enhanced town centre park – work scheduled to commence in May 2017;
- Carnival Pool – which would see the refurbishment of the existing swimming pool and the creation of a new leisure/community centre alongside a new multi-storey car park with 529 parking spaces – work on the car park commenced in June 2016.

The report also gave details of the financial objectives agreed for the regeneration proposals. These included a requirement that the regeneration scheme must be financially viable and deliverable with a minimum 5% return on cost. The scheme must also be financially self-supporting as a commercial investment and be delivered without subsidy from local Council Tax payers. The report indicated that the combined regeneration projects were forecast to deliver a financial surplus of £16m to the Council.

Members raised the following points and questions:

- The town centre regeneration proposals were based on retail studies carried out in 2010 and 2013. Did the current proposals reflect the latest changes in a fast moving retail market? It was confirmed that the Council was now receiving retail market intelligence through discussions with potential retail tenants and was monitoring other regeneration schemes such as the regeneration of Bracknell town centre.
- What was the most significant risk facing the Council in its role as developer? It was stated that a key risk was variation in construction costs which could significantly alter the financial viability of a project. In order to mitigate this risk the Council had already agreed some fixed cost contracts and would be seeking to negotiate similar arrangements throughout the town centre projects.

- The Borough's population, including Wokingham town, was projected to increase significantly, but were there any projections of future footfall for Wokingham town centre? It was confirmed that a written reply would be provided on this issue.
- What was the composition of the Development Partnership and what was the process followed? It was confirmed that the Council's development partners were Wilson Bowden and their partner company David Wilson Homes. They had been appointed following a comprehensive EU competitive dialogue procurement process.
- Concern was expressed about the possible introduction of shared facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, particularly in relation to the needs of visually impaired pedestrians. It was confirmed that this issue had recently been addressed in work on the regeneration of the Wokingham town centre market place. The needs of visually impaired pedestrians had been given a high priority.
- What steps were being taken to ensure that the town centre regeneration was financially viable and made the projected financial return for the Council? It was confirmed that, in addition to negotiating fixed cost contracts, the Council was seeking 70% pre-lets on the Elms Field project before work commenced. That would provide a high level of confidence as the scheme progressed. The overall aim was not to maximise financial returns. It was to achieve a surplus whilst delivering a regenerated town centre which met the needs of local residents.
- Would the regenerated town centre provide a balanced mix of retail, food and entertainment? It was confirmed that this was a key issue for the overall scheme. Steps were being taken to promote a range of businesses in the town. For example, the Peach Place frontages were, in the main, restricted to retail outlets.
- What letting time periods were being negotiated? It was confirmed that a variety of letting periods were being discussed ranging from 10 to 25 years. There was also strong interest from local independent traders which could result in shorter lets from 5 to 10 years.
- What was the width of car park spaces in the new car parking provision? It was confirmed that a space width of 2.4m had been agreed for all new parking spaces across the town centre. This provided greater convenience for car park users and was welcomed.

**RESOLVED:** That

- 1) Councillor Ashwell and Bernie Pich be thanked for attending the meeting and providing a detailed update on the regeneration of Wokingham town centre;
- 2) That a written answer be provide for the question relating to projected future footfall in Wokingham town centre.

### **23. REVIEW OF PROCUREMENT - IMPACT OF NEW PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS**

The Chairman reported that, due to ill health, Councillor Pauline Jorgensen was unable to attend the meeting to answer questions on this item. The Chairman asked Members to submit any questions on the report, Agenda pages 61 to 65, to Neil Carr in Democratic

Services. The level of Member feedback would determine whether the item should be rescheduled for a future meeting.

**RESOLVED:** That Members submit questions and queries on the Review of Procurement report to Neil Carr in Democratic Services.

#### **24. HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT UPDATE AND IMPROVEMENTS TO WORK AND SCHEME PROGRAMMES**

The Committee considered a report, Agenda pages 67 to 70, which provided an update on highways maintenance activities and highway schemes provided by the Wokingham Highways Alliance. The alliance comprised Wokingham Borough Council, WSP Parsons Brinkerhoff and Balfour Beatty Living Places. The report also updated Members on the development of future work programmes. Alex Deans, Head of Highways and Transport, attended the meeting to answer Member questions.

The report reminded Members of the previous update report submitted to the Committee at its meeting in June 2016. The Committee had requested a further report with more information on:

- Criteria used to determine when works are carried out and the emerging Government guidelines;
- The move towards more integrated working within Highways and Transport and the impact of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council programme;
- Initiatives to ensure that defects marked up were repaired and how improvements could be made to the overall quality of highway maintenance works;
- Improvements to the forward planning of highway maintenance works and projects.

The report provided updates on these issues and notified Members that the existing contracts for professional services (WSP Parsons Brinkerhoff) and highway maintenance and structures (Balfour Beatty Living Places) would be extended to March 2019 in order to re-energise the Highways Alliance, interface with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council programme and move towards more efficient outcomes focussed contracts. The Highways and Transport team would continue to work with the alliance partners to improve communications and the customer experience.

Members raised the following questions and points:

- Members welcomed the Highways for Members service which was speeding up response times and improving customer service. A number of examples were given of speedy responses to queries. However, it was felt that there was still room for improvement in the handling of residents' queries.
- Concern was expressed about the highway works by utility companies across the Borough. An example was discussed relating to the ongoing works in Rectory Road. It was confirmed that utility works were monitored and fines could be imposed if deadlines were not met. Members requested more information on the number and scale of fines imposed on utility companies and the permitted uses for the fines income.

**RESOLVED:** That

- 1) Alex Deans be thanked for the update report on Highways and Transport;
- 2) further information be supplied to Members on the number and range of fines imposed on utility companies and the permitted uses for the fines income;
- 3) a further update report be submitted to the Committee in 2017.

## **25. UNAUTHORISED TRAVELLER ENCAMPMENTS**

The Committee received a presentation on unauthorised Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) encampments across the Borough. Jude Whyte, Service Manager, Neighbourhood Housing, and Deana Humphries, Housing Manager, General Needs, gave the presentation and answered Member questions.

The presentation highlighted the large increase in unauthorised encampments during 2016, with 35 encampments in the year to date. The presentation listed potential reasons for the increase. Members also discussed changes to the law in Ireland which may have increased the number of travellers in the UK.

The presentation informed Members that, in the year to date, £25k had been spent on dealing with encampments. The main items of spending were court action (£1k), waste collection and disposal (£12.5k) and security works (£10k). An example was given of the recent encampment at the Cantley sports ground.

The presentation also gave details of the process for dealing with unauthorised encampments, the S61 powers available to the police and the challenges involved in legal action and cost recovery. It also gave examples of the preventative measures being introduced at key Council sites.

Members raised the following questions and points:

- Members felt that the timeframe for removing unauthorised encampments through legal proceedings (7 to 10 days) was too long. At the same time it was noted that private landowners could remove encampments with a shorter timeframe. It was suggested that Officers write to the Lord Chancellor's Office to request a changes to the law which would enable a quicker process for local authorities.
- Members asked about the possibility of holding Council land within a WBC owned company. Would this arrangement enable the Council to use the same timeframe as private landowners?
- Members welcomed the deployment of prevention measures at key sites and supported a more proactive approach to the challenges posed by unlawful encampments.

**RESOLVED:** That

- 1) Deana Humphries and Jude Whyte be thanked for the presentation to the Committee;
- 2) That the Officers give further consideration to the ideas and feedback from Members, with a further update to the Committee in 2017.

**26. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered its Work Programme, set out on Agenda pages 73 to 76.

**RESOLVED:** That the Work Programme for 2016/17 be noted.