

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 15 JANUARY 2018 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.30 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Shahid Younis (Chairman), Bill Soane (Vice-Chairman), Pauline Jorgensen, Abdul Loyes, Ken Miall, Philip Mirfin and David Sleight

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Ian Pittock and Malcolm Richards

Officers Present

Neil Carr (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist), Alex Deans (Highways and Transport Transition Lead) and Bernie Pich (Assistant Director, Strategic Property and Commercial Assets)

29. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey (Ian Pittock attended as a substitute).

30. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 November 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

31. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

32. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

33. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

34. WOKINGHAM TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

The Committee considered a report, set out on Agenda pages 9 to 18, which provided an update on the Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration projects. The Regeneration projects comprised:

- Peach Place (the area behind the current blue hoardings and the adjacent part of Rose Street);
- Carnival Phase 1 (the new multi-storey car park and ground floor leisure unit);
- Elms Field (the former Wellington House site, the park and the Paddocks car park);
- Carnival Phase 2 (the area made up of the leisure centre, adjacent offices and former bowling alley site).

In relation to Peach Place, the report stated that the development was progressing well and remained on target for completion by Xmas 2018. The Council had also purchased the former M&S site which was now undergoing a detailed options appraisal. In the short term the M&S site would be let to a charitable organisation. The Executive had also agreed that the 22 apartments in the development would be leased to a Council-owned housing company for the provision of key worker housing.

In relation to Carnival Phase 1, the multi-storey car park was now operational and the new bowling alley/laser quest facility opened in November 2017. The multi-storey car park had been developed as part of the Council's strategic approach to parking in the longer term, meeting capacity requirements when the Paddocks car park closes and serving vehicles entering the town from the south.

In relation to Elms Field, the Council was finalising detailed negotiations with its preferred partner, McLaughlin and Harvey. The overall completion target remained as the end of 2019 to 2020. Pre-construction works were ongoing with a more detailed programme of phasing and works to be released shortly.

In relation to Carnival Phase 2, the Council had decided to build a new leisure centre which would improve the site layout and deliver better value for money. The revised layout would also allow the relocation of Wokingham Library. Work on Carnival Phase 2 would commence following completion of the new Bulmershe leisure centre and significant progress on the Elms Field project.

The report noted that the ongoing Market Place improvement project was being managed separately. Members would receive a briefing note on progress relating to the Market Place. The report also gave details of the impact of the regeneration in relation to town centre roads, footpaths and car parks.

In relation to local businesses and shops, the report set out a number of initiatives such as Free after Three parking, regular communication, awareness raising, events and promotion of the town and its businesses.

The report also gave an assessment of national and local retail conditions. Whilst the national average vacancy rate (empty shops) stood at around 11% to 12% the vacancy rate for Wokingham stood at 1% (based on 182 commercial units). The Council had also secured strong pre-lets for Elms Field including Aldi, Everyman Cinema and Premier Inn.

In the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points and questions:

- In relation to the short term let of the M&S site to a charitable organisation, would the agreement include a break clause to protect the Council's position? It was confirmed that the arrangement (to be announced shortly) would include a four week break clause.
- Following recent questions about disabled car parking at the Carnival Pool site, had the issues raised been resolved? It was confirmed that a follow up meeting had been arranged between Imogen Shepherd-Dubey and the Chief Executive.
- Following completion of the northern and southern distributor roads would consideration be given to the introduction of pedestrianised areas in the town centre? It was confirmed that traffic flows in and around the town centre would be monitored as the regeneration progressed and new roads were completed. Relevant options would be considered in order to ensure that the town centre remained an attractive place to work and visit and public transport was able to operate effectively.

- How many local businesses had contacted the Council's consultants, Vail Williams, to discuss potential support with the business rates system? It was confirmed that nine businesses had been in discussions with Vail Williams.
- How would the regeneration project deliver an improved cultural and entertainment offer in the town centre? It was confirmed that the project would deliver improved facilities for open air concerts and events, a new cinema, improved exhibition space and a concert facility in the Carnival Phase 2 facility. The Market Place improvements would also support outside events and make the market more attractive to visitors.
- What had been the impact of the regeneration and Market Place projects on town centre businesses and retailers? It was confirmed that there had inevitably been a negative impact on town centre retailers. However, a number of measures had been taken to support traders and ensure that effective communication was in place. It was estimated that the Market Place improvements would be completed by April 2018 which would give a significant boost to businesses and retailers.

Karen Dodd (Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce) addressed the meeting and gave feedback on the town centre regeneration from business members of the Chamber. The feedback highlighted the need for regular, clear information about progress and milestones. It also highlighted the perceived benefits of the project in terms of creating a more attractive town centre which would help to boost inward investment and make the town a more attractive place to live and work.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Town Centre Regeneration update report be noted;
- 2) Karen Dodd be thanked for attending the meeting on behalf of the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce;
- 3) an update report on the Market Place improvement scheme be circulated to Members;
- 4) the Federation of Small Businesses be invited to provide feedback on the impact of the town centre improvements at a future meeting of the Committee.

35. HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT WORKS PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 19 to 26, which provided an update on highways maintenance activity and the planned highway maintenance programme for the year ahead.

The programme would be delivered as part of the final year of the Wokingham Highways Alliance, the partnership between the Council, WSP Professional Services and Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP). The programme included:

- highway safety inspections, reactive works and assurance checks;
- the highway maintenance programme for 2018/19;
- major highway projects to support the Strategic Development Locations (SDLs);
- highways and transport communications initiatives;
- improvements underway and proposals for new contracts from April 2019.

The report gave details of the implementation of the Council's Highways Maintenance Management Plan 2013 and the adopted Highways Asset Management Policy and Strategy 2016. Effective asset management reduced the need for reactive works including patching and pothole filling which, in turn, delivered better value for money.

In relation to the SDLs the Council was progressing new distributor roads comprising the North and South Wokingham Distributor Roads, Winnersh Relief Road and Arborfield Cross Relief Road. Details of the construction programme for the relief roads would be circulated to local communities early in 2018.

The report gave details of new requirements from Central Government including self-assessments relating to asset management and service efficiency and a new code of practice on Well Maintained Highways.

The report also provided an update on communications initiatives aimed at more joined up working and better information flows for residents and Town and Parish Councils. The service had also carried out a Highways and Transport survey in November/December 2017.

Members were informed that Highways England had been invited to attend the meeting to provide an update on Smart Motorways. Unfortunately, it was not possible to send a representative due to other commitments. However, Highways England would be happy to provide a representative at a future meeting.

In the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points and questions:

- How were schemes prioritised for inclusion in the Structural Maintenance Roads Programme and was it possible to share data on individual roads with Ward Members? It was confirmed that priorities were determined following a technical evaluation. Members queried whether the evaluation process included residential roads. It was confirmed that residential roads were included and that all roads were inspected annually.
- (Note: it was subsequently reported that it was not currently possible to share data on the inspection of individual roads. However, the new Highways and Transport contract (April 2019) would include an improved IT solution which would include improved data and improved access for Members and residents.)
- In relation to the 30,000 road gullies in the Borough, what checks were made to ensure that the contractor was carrying out the works effectively? It was confirmed that a new contractor had been appointed and that regular monitoring inspections were ongoing.
- In relation to the challenges facing the Council, what were the implications of the projected uptake in electric vehicles? It was confirmed that infrastructure issues such as charging points in residential areas and public car parks were under consideration as demand was likely to increase.
- Were the drainage risks relating to new roads and houses identified and mitigated? It was confirmed that the Council's SuDS Strategy (Sustainable Drainage Systems) was approved by the Executive in 2017, following a public consultation exercise. The

strategy sets out the long term vision for the use of sustainable drainage systems in the Borough with a focus on managing flood risk and improving the water environment.

- Bill Soane referred to a specific issue relating to a potential cycleway between Colemansmoor Road and Bader Way. Woodley Town Council had been offered a piece of land in the area but were not made aware of the fact that part of it could be included within the cycleway. There appeared to be a lack of joined up thinking. It was confirmed that Officers would investigate and provide a written response on this issue.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the report be noted;
- 2) the Highway Maintenance Programme for 2018/19 be noted;
- 3) the proposed improvement initiatives included in the 2018/19 programme be supported;
- 4) Officers confirm the process for assessing roads for inclusion in the annual Structural Maintenance Roads Programme;
- 5) Officers provide a written answer to Bill Soane on the issues relating to the potential cycleway in Woodley.

36. MAY 2018 LOCAL ELECTIONS

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 27 to 30, which gave details of the options for the timing of the election count following the local elections on 3 May 2018.

The report stated that, on 3 May 2018, there would be elections to seats in 18 out of the 25 Borough wards. In addition there would be elections for four Parish Councils, which may or may not be contested.

The report outlined the options for holding the count which were:

- Option 1 - Immediately following the close of polls at 10pm and overnight through the early hours of 4 May;
- Option 2 - Later in the day on 4 May;
- Option 3 - Saturday 5 May.

The report outlined the pros and cons for each option and concluded that Option 1 was the most effective, taking into account the needs of all stakeholders.

RESOLVED: That the proposal to hold the Borough and Parish election counts immediately following the close of polls on 3 May 2018 be supported.

37. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 31-32, which gave details of the Committee's Work Programme.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the published Work Programme be noted;
- 2) the Federation of Small Businesses be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to provide feedback on the impact of the Town Centre Regeneration and Market Place schemes;
- 3) Members contact Democratic Services with suggestions for future Scrutiny items. (Note: David Sleight subsequently submitted a request for an item relating to the ongoing justification for the proposed Coppid Beech Park and Ride).

38. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

There were no items subject to exclusion.