

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1st March, 2012

PRESENT – Councillor Long (in the Chair); Councillors Carson, Cossins, Harman, Lawton, Lewis, E.A. Richmond and Wright. (7)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Baldwin, Grundy, L. Hughes and Wright. (4)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Coultas. (1)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Tim Crawshaw, Principal Officer (Urban Design, Environment and Sustainability Officer and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

P18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

P19. MINUTES – Submitted - The Minutes (previously circulated) of meetings of this Scrutiny Committee held on 5th and 12th January, 2012.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as correct records.

P20. MATTERS ARISING – (1) Pursuant to Minute P14(c)/Jan/12, Members were advised that the Committee had been asked to specifically look at Broadband in order to feed into the Economic Strategy Event scheduled for 8th March, however the Review could be widened to look at access to digital services if necessary.

(2) Pursuant to Minute P14/Jan/12, Members were given further information regarding the background and format of the Economic Strategy Event.

P21. SCRUTINY – WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12 – The Director of Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during the current Municipal Year.

The submitted report outlined those areas where this Scrutiny Committee had previously identified it would like to focus its work over the next Municipal Year namely, Civil Parking Enforcement, Town Centre Fringe, Local Development Framework, Housing Strategy, Economic Strategy and Transformation Projects.

It was also emphasised that the work programme was a rolling programme and any Member of this Scrutiny could request an item to be included provided that a Quad of Aims had been submitted to the Scrutiny Committee prior to ensure that it contributed to the strategic aims of the Council.

The submitted report outlined the original Work Programme and requested Members to reconsider the Work Programme to accommodate further issues that need to be included and approve a number of Quads of Aims for some additional items.

Discussion ensued on the work of the Review Groups recently established by this Committee and dates were suggested for further meetings of those Groups, the venue for the re-housing of the Borough Art Collection once the Arts Centre is closed and the need to look at supported bus services during June and December.

RESOLVED – (a) That the current status of the Work Programme be noted.

(b) That the submitted Quads of Aims in respect of Town Centre Fringe, Broadband Access Review Group, Cultural Provision and Effectiveness of CCTV within the Borough appended to the report be approved.

P22. TOWN CENTRE FRINGE – The Director of Place submitted a report (previously circulated) which introduced the Town Centre Fringe Masterplan consultation report which had been agreed, as a basis for consultation, by Cabinet on 10th January, 2012. A PowerPoint presentation which comprised of various diagrams accompanied the report.

Several key issues were known prior to the Masterplan process such as flood risk, poor quality housing stock, low land values and development impact on traffic movement. The Scrutiny Committee was also informed that there was a need to get people living and working close to the Town Centre in order to create a vibrant and sustainable Town Centre and part of that process was to regenerate the part of Darlington known as the Town Centre Fringe to create a riverside walk, 250,000 square feet of commercial space and 650 new homes. The scheme would regenerate the area between the Town Centre and Central Park and modifications to the ring road, which included removal of ring roads and installation of traffic lights, would connect the east side of Darlington to the Town Centre.

References were also made to the removal of the culvert and provision of a bridge at Victoria Road to open up that area for regeneration and business purposes.

The proposals would aid regeneration in the Central, Park East and Northgate Wards; walkways across the ring road would determine direct pedestrian access to Parkgate, Haughton Road and Bank Top Station; and sloping river banks would allow the river to breathe, thereby preventing flooding and encouraging wildlife downstream.

The scheme, to be completed in the next 15 to 20 years, was expected to cost £51.8m and would be financed by selling of Council-owned land and Government and European funding opportunities.

Discussion ensued on the narrowing of the ring road, modifications to the Northgate underpass area, Parkgate junction improvements and the implications on parking in the Town Centre.

Particular references were made to the schemes relationship to the LDF Core Strategy; public participation with residents and community groups; the seven core values for the Town Centre Fringe Masterplan; creation of a Cultural Quarter for Darlington; removal of the gasholder in the area; and the creation of a district heating and energy network

RESOLVED – (a) That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to Mr. Crawshaw for his informative presentation.

(b) That the current position with regard to the Town Centre Fringe be noted.

(c) That Place Scrutiny Committee endorse the options outlined in relation to the Town Centre Fringe Masterplan.

(d) That more information be provided relating to strategic highway options, car parking and LTP3 opportunities.

(e) That the district heating option, as outlined in the submitted report, be endorsed.

(f) That the sustainability options, as outlined in the submitted report, be endorsed.

(g) That the heritage issues, as outlined in the submitted report, be endorsed.

(h) That this Scrutiny Committee continue to monitor the progress of the Town Centre Fringe Masterplan.
