

## **PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

5th September, 2013

**PRESENT** – Councillor Long (in the Chair); Councillors Baldwin, Carson, Cossins, Harman, Lawton, E.A. Richmond and Wright. (8)

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Grundy, L. Hughes and Lewis. (3)

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – David Willmore, Theatresearch.. (1)

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Ian Thompson, Assistant Director, Community Services, Mike Crawshaw, Head of Culture, Valerie Adams, Principal Officer, Planning Policy and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

**P8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

**P9. MINUTES** – Submitted - The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 20 June, 2013.

**RESOLVED** – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

**P10. CIVIC THEATRE RESTORATION** – Mr David Wilmore of Theatresearch gave a presentation on the current proposals for the restoration of the Civic Theatre.

Mr. Wilmore outlined that the challenge facing Darlington Borough Council was to ensure the Civic Theatre was preserved in all its Edwardian splendour, to equip it to receive the biggest and best shows on tour and to ensure that audiences have a wonderful experience from the moment they enter the theatre.

Scrutiny Committee were advised that in order to achieve this goal it was intended to try to extend the footprint of the theatre. This would provide better facilities and access for audiences and also create improved technical facilities back stage, which would allow the Council to bring in bigger shows and make the Theatre more successful than ever before.

It was emphasised that the Civic Theatre was an important part of Darlington's heritage and as there are only around 60 such buildings in use as a Theatre in the UK, that point would be very strongly put forward within the Stage 1 Application for the Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) bid. HLF funding was being sought to provide facilities to support education and activity space for all ages, make available opportunities to raise heritage awareness throughout the building and deliver an improved customer experience which would encourage repeat visits. Some ideas being considered were radical but it was hoped they embraced the heritage.

It was also stated that the building had to work harder and service the public quickly at all times during the show, circulation around the building required improving, a lift needed to be installed and better facilities were required backstage for all performers.

Members were advised that the previous twelve months at the Theatre had been excellent compared to the past five years. The 60th Anniversary Mousetrap had sold out for the entire week resulting in £149,000 ticket sales, Pitman Painters had sold 2600 tickets, Rocky Horror Show had sold 4000 tickets and Opera and Ballet performances 1400 and 3000 tickets respectively. Children's performances were also well attended and many sales were beyond the Borough.

The timeline for restoration was outlined with HLF Stage 1 application being August to November 2013 and the decision November 2013 to April 2014. If funding were obtained the official reopening of the Theatre following refurbishment would be December 2016.

As a local authority Darlington has supported and championed the Civic Theatre since the 1960's. The Theatre is an extremely important part of Darlington and is valued by both Darlington Borough Council and residents.

Discussion ensued on the lack of space backstage, the need to maintain the diverse use of the Theatre, such as award ceremonies, possibility of making the upstairs meeting room available for public use and the bar area open on non-performance days. Members also emphasised the need to liaise closely with Highways Officers and other organisations, such as DAD, to ensure pedestrian, road safety and disability access issues were addressed.

With regard to the commercial aspect of the Theatre it was stated that the clientele was different every week depending on the performance which in turn dictated the refreshment and sundry sales. It was acknowledged that the Theatre was a catalyst for a bar/culture area and it was hoped that this would be developed. Members were assured that although this was a 25 year scheme all technical, cultural and social needs had been taken into account and that the closure period of the Theatre would be kept to a minimum during summer months.

As many specialist trades would be employed during the restoration period Members were keen to involve, where possible, Darlington College students, it was also emphasised that contractors would be expected to sign up to apprenticeships.

Committee were reminded that HLF would require match funding and that the ticket levy of £1 would need to continue to ensure there were funds available to maintain the building.

It was suggested that more could be done to market and publicise the Friends Group which made a valuable contribution to the Theatre.

Committee were informed that a consultant had been engaged to look at a fund-raising strategy as part of the overall HLF bid, the business model had to remain with Darlington Borough Council due to the cultural exemption and that work had to continue with the community.

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

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(b) That it be formally placed on record that Place Scrutiny Committee support and welcome the restoration project and was confident in the plans outlined for match funding.

(c) That the full support of this Scrutiny Committee be given to the HLF bid .

(d) That this Scrutiny Committee recognises the need to champion the HLF bid in the region and sub-region and through the North East Cultural Partnership.

(e) That this Scrutiny Committee welcomes the support of other local authorities and arts professionals.

(f) That the close liaison with parallel projects and the rest of the arts continue.

(g) That this Scrutiny Committee endorses the education function contained within the bid.

(h) That this Scrutiny Committee applauds the emphasis on sustainability in revenue terms and also in the environment and green programmes.

(i) That this Scrutiny Committee endorses the approach to the bid as being complementary to One Darlington Perfectly Placed and Creative Darlington Policy.

**P11. SCRUTINY – WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13** – 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 Strategy, Town Centre Regeneration, Local Development Framework, Carbon Management and Economic Strategy.

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.

Discussion ensued on the need for Scrutiny Committee to look at the informal use of open space in the Borough and the possible establishment of a Task and Finish to consider the MTFP.

During Minute P13 below discussion ensued on the possible establishment of a Task and Finish Review Group to give consideration to Fly Tipping in the Borough.

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

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(b) That the Work Programme be updated to reflect the decisions of this Scrutiny Committee.

**P12. LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION – FEEDBACK** – The Principal Officer, Planning Policy gave a presentation on the Darlington Local Plan Making and Growing Places Preferred Options Consultation Feedback.

It was stated that the consultation period was 21 June to 9 August and during that time over 8000 letters and e-mails were sent out, events were advertised in June and July Darlington Together magazine, over 15 public consultation events and stakeholder events were held, Officers attended community group meetings and Councillors views were sought.

Consultation events were largely well attended with many views put forward, about 400 e-mail/written responses have been received so far from both local and non-residents, editorials have appeared in the Northern Echo and the Darlington and Stockton Times and Members have recently attended a Workshop Event.

Scrutiny Committee were advised that many of the comments received related to the process used, the amount of housing stock needed, the location of future housing developments and the larger sites outlined for such development. Other issues discussed included the Town Centre Fringe, Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation, employment land, playing fields and open spaces and accommodation for older people.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Planning Policy Officer for her informative presentation.

(b) That a special meeting of Place Scrutiny Committee be arranged to give consideration to all responses and consider the next steps.

**P13. REFUSE COLLECTION (WHEELED BINS) REVIEW GROUP** – The Director of Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) to present the outcome and findings of the Review Group established by this Scrutiny Committee to examine the introduction of wheeled bins in the Borough.

Members of the Review Group met on seven occasions and a wide number of issues were discussed and considered at those meetings. Several Members of the Group also undertook a visit to a neighbouring authority to ascertain whether any problems were encountered during implementation of the wheeled bin system.

**RESOLVED** – That this Scrutiny Committee approves the following recommendations of the Review Group and forward to Cabinet for its consideration:-

- (a) That the thanks of the Refuse Collection (Wheeled Bins) Review Group, for the successful wheeled bins introduction in the Borough, be conveyed to all employees;
  - (b) Although the Review Group has concluded Place Scrutiny Committee would like to monitor progress in 2014 on the following;
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- (i) Recycling Rates;
  - (ii) Fly Tipping;-
  - (iii) Replacement wheeled bin costs; and
  - (iv) General operational issues.
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- (c) That Place Scrutiny Committee receives a detailed financial breakdown including savings on street cleansing;
  - (d) That a visit for Members of Place Scrutiny Committee to John Wade Waste management be arranged during the Autumn; and
  - (e) That the idea of engaging educational establishments on waste management be investigated

**P14. CULTURAL PROVISION REVIEW GROUP** – Submitted -- The notes of the meeting of the Cultural Provision Review Group held on 12th July, 2013.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the notes be approved as a correct record.

(b) That the progress of the Review Group be noted.

(c) That it be noted that the next meeting of the Review Group is scheduled for 24th October and to which a representative of Darlington for Culture has been invited.

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