

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19 January 2016

PRESENT – Councillor Carson (in the Chair); Councillors Cossins, Lyonette, MR Nicholson and Wright. (5)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Baldwin, Donoghue, L Hughes and York. (3)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Dixon and C Taylor. (2)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Ian Williams, Director of Economic Growth, Dave Winstanley, Assistant Director, Transport and Capital Projects, Elizabeth Davison, Assistant Director, Finance and Human Resources, Steve Petch, Place Strategy Manager and Lead Officer, Simon Houldsworth, Principal Policy Officer and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

Representing Outside Bodies -

Arup, Consulting Engineers –
Steve Wells, Arthur Smart and Elliott Wishlade.

JJ Consultants (Civil Engineering)
Kevin Carrick

P35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interests reported at the meeting.

P36. BANK TOP MASTERPLAN – The Assistant Director, Transport and Capital Projects gave the background to the Bank Top Masterplan, which had been prepared by Arup, Consultants, and in doing so stated that transport was a high priority for the north east as connectivity to the rest of England would bring economic benefits to both Darlington and the Tees Valley. It was stated that Workshop 3 had provided more details, although there were many assumptions, and that an agreed Masterplan was required. The Workshop had been attended by many Stakeholders including North Yorkshire County Council, Durham County Council and a range of business partners. A PowerPoint presentation by Arup gave further information to Committee.

Members were informed that all ideas were to be well thought through and considered in order to produce the Masterplan at the end of February 2016. Particular reference was made to the four key study objectives of Region – improved rail connectivity on the East coast Main Line; Economy – advanced local development and economic growth; Identity – protect and strengthen the identify of heritage assets; and Connection – improved bus, cycle and pedestrian access to Bank Top Station.

Scrutiny was advised that there Darlington was the gateway to the Tees Valley and there were opportunities to connect to the existing activity in the Tees Valley Enterprise Zone and develop a stronger Darlington brand.

Particular reference was made to the core of the vision which was the provision of a new Eastern Platforms and extended footbridge access from the Portico through the

existing building. The only planned demolition works would be to the 1980's infill buildings where currently train tickets were bought.

Scrutiny was advised that there could be opportunities for smaller business within the Station and with a new welcome to Darlington, by a more modern contemporary entrance, there was also the potential for increased investment.

Particular reference was made to the Vision for Bank Top Station – A thriving Station, a Station at the heart of town life, a connected urban place and a hub of work and innovation. This was an excellent opportunity to change the perception of Darlington and build on Central Park and Teesside University. Enhanced east west connection with new public space at the east and west entrances would provide an improved traveller experience and connect a network of public spaces and key sites including the Market Square, Cultural Quarter, Town Centre Fringe, Town Centre, Central Park and the Education Centre.

Committee were provided with narratives of how visitors to Darlington, a mother and child, a student and a company director could utilise the Station, its public spaces and key sites.

Members were reminded that Darlington was well placed due to its position and education links and that it was important to build upon the strengths of Darlington in order to attract occupiers and investors. Although big investment was required it could be delivered in small portions successfully. New housing developments within the Town would provide economic opportunities for Darlington although there were big challenges in relation to costs and value. Darlington rents would need to be adjusted to ensure investment success and small medium enterprises would require help to expand and attract new business.

It was stressed that any developer or investor would require assurances that the Local Authority was able to deliver, work in partnership and attract both private and public funding.

Discussion ensued on the rail operators' involvement and investment, including Virgin and Northern Rail, as the biggest landowner around Bank Top Station; possible housing and car parking developments within the surrounding area; need to ensure that CP6 would be able to access Bank Top Station, however this would be determined by Network Rail's investment along the railway line; and electrification of the railway through Darlington.

RESOLVED – (a) That the thanks of this Committee be extended to Arup and JJ Consultants for their informative and interesting presentation.

(b) That a further meeting be arranged to give consideration to the Masterplan Options when available.

P37. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN – Submitted - A report (previously circulated) in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 1 December 2015.

The report set out the two-stage approach to revise the MTFP and the Assistant Director, Finance and Human Resources referred to the first stage which was currently being consulted on in relation to the setting of the Council Tax for 2016/17, along with the fees and charges and that the second stage, to be considered by Cabinet in February, would be to further revise the MTFP, following receipt of the Local Government Finance Settlement.

Members queried why the Sex Shop Grant and the Sexual Entertainment Venue Grant had both reduced by £1,500 and raised concerns over the introduction of charges relating to replacement Wheeled Bins.

The Chair requested information relating to the charges for Animal Boarding Licences which were the same whether the Licence was for a Large Kennel or a small home run business.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be noted.

(b) That the Assistant Director, Finance and Human Resources seek clarification on the points raised by Members in relation to the reduction in Sex Shop Grant and the Sexual Entertainment Venue Grant, new charges relating to replacement Wheeled Bins and Boarding Licences for Kennels.
