

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 December 2016

PRESENT – Councillor Carson (in the Chair); Councillors Cossins, Lyonette, Mills, MR Nicholson, Tostevin and Wright. (7)

APOLOGIES – Councillor York. (1)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Baldwin and Coultas, Paul Howell and Yvonne Richardson, Friends of the Library. (4)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – John Anderson, Assistant Director – Economic Initiative; Lynda Winstanley, Civic Theatre Director, Tim Crawshaw, Built and Natural Environment Manager and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

P13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interests reported at the meeting.

P14. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 20 October, 2016.

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

P15. MATTERS ARISING – There were no matters arising.

P16. EXPERIENCE DARLINGTON A VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGY – The Director of Economic Growth submitted a report (previously circulated) seeking the views of Scrutiny on the proposals within the draft Experience Darlington – A Visitor Strategy. Four PowerPoint presentations entitled ‘Experience Darlington A Visitor Economy Strategy’; ‘Darlington Culture Strategy’; ‘Darlington Hippodrome – A Place for the Imagination’; and ‘Darlington’s Heritage Economy’ accompanied the report.

The Assistant Director, Economic Initiative informed Members that the proposed approach to a Visitor Strategy for the Borough would deliver significant economic benefits by creating more jobs and spending in the area. It would also enable more participation and opportunities for the arts and culture sector to add value and opportunities to enhance and reinforce Darlington’s reputation and perception on a national and potentially international scale.

Reference was made to the work of the Railway Heritage Group that had researched Darlington’s heritage and to the work of the Creative Darlington Board that had formed a strong partnership to promote the arts and cultural activities within the Borough. Both pieces of work had combined to form the basis of a Culture Strategy that is one of four themes to the wider Experience Darlington Visitor Strategy. The remaining three themes are Town Centre Economy, Gateway Economy and Place Making/

Regeneration Economy.

Creative Darlington Board recommends that the Culture Strategy should focus on three priorities, namely, Theatre Town, Railway Heritage and the 2025 City of Culture.

In relation to the 2025 City of Culture Members were advised of the Tees Valley Combined Authority plans to bid to be the 2025 City of Culture based around the Tees Valley's industrial heritage. This links with the 2025 celebration of the first passenger railway between Darlington and Stockton.

Details were supplied of further engagement to be undertaken with key stakeholders, the wider community, business community and the wider public to ensure the ambitions of the Council for its communities could be refined and resources aligned enabling practical and realistic first steps towards the longer term goals.

Reference was made to a Town Centre Conference scheduled to be held March 2017 with a focus to review the Town Centre Action Plan, the Local Plan and opportunities in the Digital High Street concept being promoted by Digital City.

Members noted that if the attractiveness of the Town can be increased to leisure visitors then it is estimated that further spending could amount to £26m in the local economy and provide around 500 employment opportunities.

Scrutiny Committee heard the views of a member of Friends of the Library who highlighted that Crown Street Library was an integral part of Darlington's Heritage and should be retained as such for the purpose it was intended or as a Railway Heritage Centre.

A Member also commented that Darlington had fantastic assets as the Railway industry generated many industries which should be showcased and made attractive to visitors.

Discussion and challenge ensued on several items including the use of historic buildings; the Council's long term vision; Parkgate being awarded conservation area status; and availability of sustainable transport funding for a new footbridge to link Bank Top Station to Parkside.

Members welcomed the Civic Theatre investment to help establish a cultural quarter; delivery of projects to encourage residents to attend the Theatre; and availability of alternative venues for art and cultural events.

It was suggested that the Reith Lectures, a series of annual radio lectures given by leading figures of the day, commissioned by the BBC and broadcast on BBC Radio 4 and the BBC World Service, be secured for Darlington 2025 as this would attract many visitors to Darlington.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received.

(b) That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to Officers for their informative presentations.

(c) That the draft Experience Darlington – A Visitor Economy Strategy be welcomed.

P17. WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17 – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee’s work programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2016/17.

Members previously agreed a revision to the Work Programme to enable the Committee to analyse information for each topic area aligning it to the eight outcomes and the three conditions in the Sustainable Community Strategy and relevant performance indicators within the Performance Management Framework.

The Chair and Officers referred to the scheduled in the submitted report and provided Members with an updated position in relation to individual items.

Discussion ensued on the timescale for receiving a report on outcomes from the Medium Term Financial Plan 2016-20 and several of the current Work Programme items feeding into the Local Plan.

In relation to the Bank Top Masterplan, the Assistant Director, Economic Initiatives advised Members that Network Rail was due to announce its spending plans during March/April 2017. Arups, the Consultants working on the Masterplan had completed an evidence base to expand to Control Period 6. Network Rail Control Periods are the 5-year timespans into which Network Rail works for financial and other planning purposes. Each Control Period begins on 1 April and ends on 31 March to coincide with the financial year.

As Network Rail is responsible for developing and maintaining railway infrastructure, the Control Periods are used to decide priorities for investment.

It was reported that ‘Cycling in the Pedestrian Heart’ and ‘Road Safety Audit’ had been deferred to 6 April 2017 and that a report was to be submitted to Cabinet in January relating to the Library Service.

Members requested progress on the Red Hall Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy; and an update on the Blue Badge scheme be submitted to the next meeting of Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – That the Work Programme be updated to reflect the decisions of this Scrutiny Committee.

P18. DARLINGTON LOCAL PLAN 2016-2036 HIGHLIGHT REPORT – The Assistant Director, Economic Initiative submitted a report (previously circulated) outlining the progress; governance; key tasks and milestones; and risks in delivery of the Local Plan 2016 - 2036.

Particular reference was made to the Government White Paper, which was expected in January 2017, outlining changes to the formation of a Local Plan together with a new National Planning Policy Framework expected in May 2017.

Updates to the national data sets together with a possible revised methodology for calculating the OAN (Objectively Assessed Needs) for housing is likely to alter the current evidence base that has produced the 10,000 homes figure over a 20 year period to 2036. Members noted that there was always an intention to review the OAN during 2017 but that the timing of this may now be determined by the government's timetable to issue fresh guidance on OAN methodology. This could result in a delay to the current Local Plan timetable.

RESOLVED – That the position be noted.

P19. CREATIVE DARLINGTON BOARD – Submitted – The Minutes of the meeting (previously circulated) of the Creative Darlington Board held 19 September 2016 which provided updates on various topics including Experience Darlington; Developing Darlington's Culture Strategy; Great Places Opportunity; Jabberwocky Market; IncludFEST Tees Valley Forward Plans; and a Tailored Review of the Arts Council.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be received.

P20. LIBRARY SERVICE TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP – Submitted – The notes of the meeting (previously circulated) of the Library Service Task and Finish Review Group held on 31 October 2016.

A member of the public addressed the meeting seeking clarification of how many local studies items were not relevant to Darlington and what had happened to them. It was also believed that a potential move of the Library Services to the Dolphin Centre would mean access to books would be even more limited as there would be fewer books on show.

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