

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 February 2017

PRESENT – Councillor Carson (in the Chair); Councillors Donoghue, KE Kelly, Lyonette, MR Nicholson and Tostevin. (6)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Cossins, Wright and York. (3)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Knowles and S Richmond. (2)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Bill Westland, Assistant Director, Regulatory Services, Tim Crawshaw, Built and Natural Environment Manager, Ken Davies, Housing Strategy Officer, David Alley, Customer Service Manager, Paul Branch, CCTV and Parking Manager, Stephen Wiper, Creative Darlington Manager and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

P23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – Councillor Carson declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute P27 below as the Chair of Trustees of the Red Hall Community Centre.

P24. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meetings of this Scrutiny Committee held on 15 December, 2016 and 12 January 2017.

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

P25. MATTERS ARISING – There were no matters arising.

P26. MANAGING BLUE BADGE ISSUE AND USE – Pursuant to Minute P6/Sep/16, the Director of Economic Growth submitted a report (previously circulated) on the issue and use of Blue Badges within the Borough with particular reference to the possibility of undertaking home visits where applicants were unable to attend the Town Hall in person.

Scrutiny was advised that the over-riding aim of the scheme was to enable the badge holder to park closer to their destination if they're disabled and that it was not unreasonable to expect the person applying for the badge to park close to the Town Hall as the journey to the Town Hall was no different to any other journey the applicant may make.

Whilst Officers can attend to the applicant in their car, on an appointment basis, Officers do not have the resources to make home visits. The Council must also be satisfied that the badge will be used by the person applying and not a family member taking advantage of a bed-ridden relative.

It was also stated that posting of photos and copies of ID to the Council had been considered but the essential failing was that the Council could not be satisfied that the person applying matched the photo being provided which would create an opportunity for fraudulent applications to be made.

References were also made to the development of an Information Flyer or Leaflet, however, Members were reminded that the Blue Badge process was completed by a Central Government partner called Northgate, who send the badge to the applicant, together with the standard rights and responsibilities and a leaflet which included all of the relevant advice on the rules of using a blue badge. Occasionally Customer Services work with the Council's Communications Team to update News Feeds with pertinent Blue Badge information, such as checking expiry dates.

Scrutiny was advised that lost and stolen badges were recorded in the Central Government issuing system (Blue Badge Improvement Service - BBIS) and the badge was cancelled and replaced as appropriate. Any warden in the country can check the status of a Blue Badge issued by any authority to check validity.

In relation to benchmarking, Darlington was modelled on Stockton's process; decisions on eligibility can be made within seven minutes of a telephone application, which is faster than neighbouring authorities who still have application forms; and the telephony application process is much leaner than the national system of applying online which takes up to 10 days to process.

Details were supplied of technological advances such as 'gov.uk Verify', which allows a resident to apply, check eligibility, verify ID, access driver licence or passport photo from the relevant government agency, and pay for a badge all in one transaction. The badge will then be automatically ordered.

Scrutiny heard the views of Darlington Association on Disability and in doing so were advised that there were two types of Blue Badges, namely, 'entitlement' and 'discretionary' and that entitled badges could not be legally taken away from the holder. Reference was also made to the Council's prohibition of home visits to Blue Badge applicants and the need for an annual month long campaign to educate Blue Badge holders about fraudulent use of badges and the consequences of such use.

Particular concerns were raised on the effect of a terminally ill person having to present at the Town Hall but Members were reassured that different criteria applied in these circumstances and presenting in person was not required.

Following discussion and challenge by Members, Officers advised Scrutiny that central government advice was that a specialist team of fraud investigators was required to investigate Blue Badge abuse; this Council did not have the resources; and it was not considered that abuse was of the extent that required an investigation team.

It was further reported that reports of misuse were investigated and if relevant passed to the DWP for investigation; regulations of the scheme stated that house-bound people do not qualify for a Blue Badge; and that Officers insisted on meeting all applicants to ensure that the photograph on the Badge is actually the applicant.

Following a request, Members were advised that performance data on enforcement of Blue Badge use and issue of parking tickets would be submitted to a future meeting of this Scrutiny.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received.

(b) That performance data relating to car parking and Blue Badge enforcement be submitted to a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

P27. (1) RED HALL RENEWAL STRATEGY — Scrutiny received a PowerPoint Presentation from the Housing Strategy Officer outlining the Red Hall Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

Members were advised that the two key areas of the Strategy were the improvement of the Council Stock and to work with local residents to build a more resilient and confident community.

It was reported that Red Hall Estate has 642 low value properties which were built on the USA Radburn Design in the 1960's and 70's. One third of these properties were owner occupied and the non-traditional design had led to poor thermal efficiency.

Details were supplied of investments to date, totalling £5.5m, including demolition of houses, construction of new flats for rent, reversal of front and back of properties, renewed double glazing and doors to 383 properties, provision of benches along walkways around the nature reserve and new play area and equipment.

Scrutiny was advised that there was now a demand for housing on Red Hall Estate, heating bills had been reduced due to improved insulation and private housing had subsequently increased in value.

Members were pleased to note that it was intended to build a sustainable and resilient community with many people currently engaging with the Council and Groundwork Trust, the development project partner. The next step was to encourage Red Hall residents to lead consultations and community activities and not rely on the Council or Groundwork Trust for support. One of the first steps in this process was production of the Red Hall Newsletter by the community and it was then hoped that the community would take control of further events including the Community Carnival.

RESOLVED – (a) That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Housing Strategy Officer for his informative and interesting presentation.

(b) That a progress report be submitted to a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

(2) HEALTHY NEW TOWN - Members also received a PowerPoint Presentation from the Built and Natural Environment Manager outlining the programme objectives of Healthy New Towns and in doing so was informed that planning had a direct link to Public Health in relation to healthy living and well-being of residents.

Details were provided of the programme objectives which were to develop new and more effective ways of shaping new towns, neighbourhoods and strong communities

that promote health and wellbeing, preventing illness and ensuring people were independent. To radically rethink how health and care services could be delivered whilst supporting the New Models of Care programme by learning how health and care services could be integrated to provide better outcomes at reduced costs.

Members were informed that the third and final objective was to accomplish objectives one and two in a way that could be replicated elsewhere. The approaches included building healthier homes and environments that supported independence at all stages of life; tackling unhealthy (and 'obesogenic') environments by creating walkable neighbourhoods; and delivering improved infrastructure for safe active travel and more accessible public transport.

Particular reference was made to the implementation of a new 'operating system' for health and care that achieves triple integration between primary and secondary care, mental and physical health, and health and social care; creating connected neighbourhoods, strong communities and inclusive public spaces that enable people of all ages and abilities from all backgrounds to mix; and designing healthy workplaces, schools and leisure facilities that make the most of opportunities to encourage physical activity, healthy eating and positive mental health and wellbeing.

Scrutiny Committee welcomed the development plans for the Darlington Eastern Growth Zone which included the building of 2500 houses at Burden Hill, Red Hall and Lingfield Point; accessibility to services, schools and employment areas; and the transport links to ensure integration of the Darlington Eastern Zone.

Whilst considering the four outcomes of the Darlington Healthy New Towns Delivery Plan, Members noted that funding was available for the next two years and that work was in hand for provision of a Health Hub at Lingfield Point.

Members reiterated that integration within the Eastern Zone was vital and that separate communities were not created.

RESOLVED – (a) That the thanks of this Committee be extended to the Built and Natural Environment Manager for his informative and interesting presentation.

(b) That a progress report on Healthy New Towns be submitted to a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

P28. DEMENTIA REVIEW GROUP – FINAL REPORT – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) detailing the outcomes and findings of the Review Group established by the Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee to look at the dementia pathway and the support and advice services available in Darlington.

This Scrutiny Committee was also requested to consider a specific recommendation within its remit, namely, that Place Scrutiny Committee consider, through the Local Plan Process, the scope to support people living with dementia when designing future design builds.

The Chair and Vice-Chair of Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee addressed Members and stated that the review had taken approximately 18 months to complete and that the recommendations were evidence based and included some challenges for the authority. Members were also provided with examples of what a dementia sufferer encounters in their everyday life together with explanations of how simple design elements could be incorporated into new buildings and developments to ensure a dementia sufferer felt safe in their surroundings and had a good quality of life.

Members were assured that there the National Planning Policy Framework guidance required local planning authorities to work with public health leads and health organisations to understand and take account of the health status of the local population so there was scope to consider the needs of people living with dementia in Planning Policy.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received.

(b) That Scrutiny Committee were satisfied that the scope to support people living with dementia when designing future builds was part of the Local Plan Process.

P29. 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 schedule in the submitted report and provided Members with an updated position in relation to individual items where possible.

Discussion ensued on whether there would be any impact of Darlington housing numbers following the Government’s recent White Paper; and the impact of the MTFP on Street Scene services in light of the public feedback that had been received.

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

P30. CREATIVE DARLINGTON BOARD – Submitted – The Minutes of the meeting (previously circulated) of the Creative Darlington Board held 12 December 2016 which provided updates on various topics including Experience Darlington, Culture Strategy and Arts Transition; Head, Hart, Hands Project; ‘Evolve’ Theatre Transition Programme; Creative Workspace and OddManOut Presentation; Accessible Arts, Culture and Heritage Presentation; and DCMS Tailored Review of Arts Council.

Discussion ensued on Darlington’s excellent culture offer which was considered one of the best in the north east; the work being undertaken by the Durham Music Service in creating opportunities for primary school children’s to access musical instruments;

creation of Music Hubs; and the excellent work being undertaken by Theatre Hullaballoon around the Theatre offer in Darlington.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be received.

P31. DARLINGTON LOCAL PLAN 2016-2036 HIGHLIGHT REPORTS 8 AND 9 – The Director of Economic Growth submitted Highlight Reports 8 and 9 (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 membership and role of the Local Plan Member Reference Group which met on a monthly basis; developers creating land banks; Government's White Paper on the planning system which could result in changes to the OAN; and the staffing resources within the Local Planning team.

RESOLVED – That the position be noted.
