
OVERVIEW OF PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Place Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

Work Programme 2015/16

2. We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee for the Municipal Year 2015/16 and possible review topics, the work programme is a rolling work programme and items can be added as necessary.

Planning for Darlington's Future Housing Needs and the Development Plan Implications

3. At a Special Meeting on 24 November 2015 we considered the Call In request by three Members of this Council to the decision taken by Cabinet at its meeting held on 3 November 2015 in relation to Planning for Darlington's Future Housing Needs and the Development Plan Implications.
4. The Call In was requested as the relevant Members felt that Cabinet did not have the correct information to enable it to make its decision and that further Scrutiny should be undertaken. The Members also requested that a revised report be submitted to Cabinet which supported a Local Plan to reflect a correctly adjusted total figure and a figure broken down into property categories as per the Strategic Housing Marketing Assessment (SHMA).
5. A representative of Middleton St George Neighbourhood Development Plan addressed the meeting and questioned the accuracy of the figures contained within the Consultant's report.
6. A Ward Councillor for Middleton St George addressed the meeting and raised concerns over producing a 25 year Local Plan, the need for intervention to halt developers 'cherry picking' development areas and lack of infrastructure.
7. Whessoe Parish Council addressed the meeting and raised concerns over the number of houses within the document and developers building on Greenfield Sites.
8. We acknowledged the concerns put forward in relation to Planning for Darlington's Future Housing Needs and the Development Plan Implications but felt satisfied that the details which needed clarifying in respect of the areas requested by the Call In had been presented through the Scrutiny process and we were satisfied that Cabinet was fully informed before making its decision.

Local Plan - Consultation Responses to Proposed Residential Development at Blackwell

9. At a Special Meeting on 24 November 2015 we considered the Call In request by three Members of this Council to the decision taken by Cabinet at its meeting held on 3 November 2015 in relation to the Local Plan – Consultation Responses to Proposed Residential Development at Blackwell.
10. The Call In was requested as the relevant Members believed that Cabinet 's decision was premature, further consultation with Place Scrutiny Committee was required in relation to He1 and the external consultees involved in the production of the report should be called to Scrutiny to explain its evidence, which conflicted with local knowledge, of further demand.
11. A Ward Councillor for Park West Ward addressed the meeting and requested evidence of the need for apartments on site He1.
12. A representative of Blackwell Parklands Association addressed the meeting raising concerns of the relaxation of the 'no exit' clause within the Blackwell Lease following provision of car parking for residents of apartments, the need for apartments on the site, availability of infrastructure to support apartments in the area and maintenance of parklands.
13. A supporter of Blackwell Parklands Association addressed the meeting and questioned the need for apartments as people wished to remain in their own homes, ration of apartments to houses n new development sites and existing planning permissions for apartment dwellings.
14. We acknowledged the concerns put forward in relation to the Local Plan – Consultation Responses to Proposed Residential Development at Blackwell but felt satisfied that the detail which needed clarifying in respect of the areas requested by the Call In had been presented through the Scrutiny process and we were satisfied that Cabinet was fully informed before making its decision.

Bank Top Masterplan

15. At a Special Meeting held on 26 November 2015 we received a PowerPoint presentation from Arup, the Council's Consultant's, on the Bank Top Masterplan.
16. We were informed that Darlington Bank Top Station had received no investment for many years and as traffic was set to increase it was important capitalise now for the future. The objectives of the Masterplan were to create an integrated transport hub, develop a strong local economy and enhance the grandeur and heritage of Bank Top Station. The draft Masterplan would be available mid to end of January 2016.
17. Reference was made to the two workshops held in Darlington, the most recent offering three illustrative Masterplan options. The key messages of the workshops included the creation of an aspirational Masterplan; influencing Darlington's Gateway status; unlocking the east/west severance; enhancement of all three Bank

Top Station entrances; retaining the existing station for rail operations; improving passenger convenience and walk distances whilst also addressing intro-platform connectivity and creating a future proof preferred option.

18. We welcomed the opportunities that could be available for retail within the Station including the pop up shops and a community market; flexible use of the portico building; and links to the cultural quarter and Victoria Road/Feethams.
19. We noted that visitor attractions could embrace Darlington's strong railway heritage with touring exhibitions utilising the portico building and linkages to the biosciences offer currently in Darlington. In relation to housing developments there could be real opportunities for regional commuters; business and enterprise prospects could be achieved by linking to business support in Central Park, utilising the Gateway to the Tees Valley via the A66 and letting industry flourish.
20. We also considered three options which are being explored for the re-modelling of Bank Top Station, namely, Station Place, providing east-west connectivity; Town Loop concentrating on the western side of the Station and Regional Hub providing a balance of both sides of the Station and linking to Central Park.

Red Hall Regeneration Proposed Masterplan and Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy

21. Although I had to declare an interest we had a special joint meeting with the Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee in November to consider the future proposals to regenerate Red Hall.
22. Members had a tour of the area and we were updated on the progress on the programme of regeneration which had commenced in January 2015. We also considered the Masterplan for Red Hall which set out the longer-term proposals for regeneration and which residents had been consulted on at a stakeholder event in September 2015.
23. We made a number of recommendations to Cabinet following the meeting and, as part of those recommendations, we have asked Officers to re-visit the proposals for the location of the local convenience shopping offer following the comments and feedback received from local residents and the local Ward Councillors; consider how the car parking for the schools and the community centre might be advanced ahead of the enabling development in order to support the early delivery of the Community Centre Business Plan; and to look at the longer-term options to improve the existing football playing field and the re-instatement of the changing room facilities.
24. A Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy has also been developed to sit alongside the Masterplan which sets out a framework and action plan to develop a much more resilient community.

Housing Strategy Monitoring Report

25. We considered a report which sought Place Scrutiny Committee's views on the Housing Strategy 2012-17. The Strategy was approved in July 2012 and contained a commitment to annually reviewing and assessing progress against targets.
26. We were advised that progress overall had been good with 55 per cent of milestones achieved in the first three years of a five year strategy. A further 27 per cent of milestones were on schedule and the Council was on course to meet its six objectives.
27. As part of the monitoring exercise 10 milestones (11 per cent) had been deleted as there were no longer appropriate, six milestones (seven per cent) were behind schedule and no new priority actions had been added to the refreshed Action Plan.
28. We noted the three areas where the Council was behind schedule, namely, provision of housing to meet local needs, slow progress on gas holder removal and flood mitigation in the Town Centre Fringe and withdrawal of the Making and Growing Places DPD resulting in planning applications being considered under national planning policies.
29. Scrutiny was also informed of the intention to seek approval to a set of Interim Planning Policies to ensure that there was some guidance in place alongside National Planning Guidelines when considering planning applications and residents were always consulted on any potential developments within their area.

Creative Darlington Board

30. We received the notes of the Creative Board Meeting held 23 November 2015 which provided updates on Creative Darlington Development and Engagement with One Darlington, Civic Theatre and Hullaballoon Capital Programme Update and Audience Development Discussion Programmes and Festival Updates and 2025 Priorities in Terms of Legacy for Darlington.

Councillor Bob Carson
Chair of Place Scrutiny Committee