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**OVERVIEW OF PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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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.

**Bank Top Masterplan**

3. At a Special Meeting held on 19 January 2016 we received a further PowerPoint presentation from Arup, the Council's Consultant's, on the Bank Top Masterplan.
4. We were informed that 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.
5. We noted that Workshop 3 had provided more details and ideas for the production of the Masterplan at the end of February, had been attended by many Stakeholders including North Yorkshire County Council, Durham County Council and a range of business partners and 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 formed the basis of the Masterplan.
6. We welcomed the core of the vision which included provision of a new Eastern Platform and extended footbridge access from the Portico through the existing building, provision of opportunities for smaller business within the Station and potential for increased investment.
7. Darlington is well placed due to its position and education links and it is important to build upon the strengths of Darlington in order to attract occupiers and investors. Although big investment is required it could be delivered successfully in small portions. 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.

## **Planning Position Whilst Preparing the New Local Plan**

8. Scrutiny received a report setting out the current policy position for the Council in terms of determining planning applications, adopted policies relevant to the decision making process and the circumstances in which National Planning Policy would take precedent.
9. Members were informed that the Council's adopted development plan used in determining the majority of planning applications within the Borough contained certain elements which have been deemed out of date in relation to housing development.
10. The decision to allow up to 250 new homes on land at Sadberge Road, Middleton St George was primarily due to the Council being unable to demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing land against a housing target based on an assessment of housing needs. Consequently none of the Council's development policies relating to the supply of housing can be considered up to date and national planning policy presumption in favour of sustainable development applies. New housing development should therefore be permitted unless there are site specific or significant sustainability reasons indicating otherwise.
11. Work undertaken to quantify the assessment of housing need indicates it is significantly larger than that being planned for in the Making and Growing Places Development Plan Document (MGP) which now needs to be formally withdrawn to enable work to commence on a comprehensive new Local Plan. Its draft policies therefore cannot be referred to in determining planning applications, unless they are agreed as part of an interim planning policy position.
12. Preparation of a new local plan will take two to three years and an interim planning policy position needs to be established comprising use of the Existing Development Plan and publication of an Interim Planning Statement.
13. Dependent upon the stage reached in the planning process these elements will have different weight when determining planning applications, therefore, an Interim Planning Statement is to be prepared to provide clarity to decision makers and developers on material considerations during local plan preparation.
14. Scrutiny Committee endorsed the approach to the Interim Policy Position and requested a Special Meeting to give consideration to the Local Plan.

## **LitterFreeDurham**

15. Scrutiny received a presentation from Councillor Lee around the work of LitterFreeDurham with particular emphasis on the Big Spring Clean 2016 held during the period 28 February to 17 April.
16. Councillor Lee advised Members that the Environment Agency cleared rivers, volunteers had collected over 500 bags of rubbish and that the cost of removing litter in the United Kingdom was £1 billion.

17. It was hoped that the anti-litter message could become part of the school curriculum and the damage to wildlife and the planet reinforced. Members were also advised that a littered town was not welcoming and could impact on the economy of the region.

**Councillor Bob Carson**  
**Chair of Place Scrutiny Committee**