

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 7 March 2019

PRESENT – Councillors Carson (Chair), Cossins, Mrs Culley, Donoghue, Kelly, Lyonette, M Nicholson and Tostevin

APOLOGIES – Councillor L Hughes

ABSENT – Councillor Wright

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Crumbie (Cabinet Member with Community Safety Portfolio), Lawton and Lee

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Ian Thompson (Assistant Director Community Services), Brian Graham (Head of Environmental Services), Mark Ladyman (Assistant Director Economic Growth), Anna Willey (Anti-Social Behaviour and Civic Enforcement Manager), David Nelson (Planning Officer), Jochen Werres (Planning Policy Officer) and Hannah Fay (Democratic Officer)

P31 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

P32 CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

It was reported that this would be the last meeting of this Scrutiny Committee for the Chair and Vice Chair. Members and Officers wished to place on record their thanks to the Chair and Vice Chair for their invaluable support and contribution to this Committee and wished them well for the future.

RESOLVED – That the thanks of this Committee be extended to Councillors Carson and Lyonette.

P33 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 13 DECEMBER 2018

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of a meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 13 December 2018.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 13 December 2018 be approved as a correct record.

P34 STRATEGIC SITES DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME DARLINGTON TOWN CENTRE

The Cabinet Member with the Economy and Regeneration Portfolio provided Members with an update on the report of the Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services (previously circulated) which had been considered by Cabinet, at its meeting held on 8 January 2019.

The submitted report detailed emerging high-level thoughts and the future development of proposals that would encourage further investment on key strategic sites in Darlington town centre. A PowerPoint presentation given by the Cabinet Member with the Economy and Regeneration Portfolio also accompanied the submitted report.

It was reported that Darlington was in the UK top ten best performing economies; its economy had grown consistently for three years and that it was rated the third highest retail town in the North East behind Newcastle and the Metro Centre; it was also reported that Darlington faced a number of challenges including higher than national vacancy rates, a reduction in footfall, high profile large vacant units, a high reliance on retail, low amount of quality business accommodation, small number of residential accommodation in the town centre, and issues with community safety and a lack green space and facilities.

Reference was made to the Cornmill Centre which faced similar reductions in footfall and increased vacant units and Members were assured that work was being undertaken with the Town Centre Reference Group to address these issues; and that this Scrutiny Committee would continue to monitor footfall trends within the town centre.

Members were informed of the objectives to improve the economic wellbeing and vitality of the town centre; that funding had been secured to invest into Darlington's heritage assets with a focus on the 2025 celebrations for Stockton and Darlington Railway; refurbishment and redevelopment plans for the Indoor Victorian Market were due to be published for a period of consultation; and that a bid would be submitted to the Future High Street Fund to support the objectives to improve Darlington town centre.

Concern was raised by Members in respect of the perception of crime in Darlington and that residents felt that the town centre was a dangerous place. It was reported that crime was down; there was a robust approach to tackling crime and anti-social behaviour in the town centre, including the introduction of the Public Space Protection Order on 1 March 2019; and that the town centre was a safe place but that perceptions would take time to change.

Following a question in relation to the location of the Outdoor Market, Scrutiny was informed that consultation had been undertaken by the Council and Market Asset Management (MAM) with market traders who preferred to remain on High Row due to greater footfall.

A Member in attendance at the meeting highlighted the need for greater promotion of tourism in Darlington. There was agreement that more needed to be done to improve tourism and Members were advised that the Town Centre Reference Group had worked with businesses to develop a new map of the town centre; and the work planned for 2025 celebrations for Stockton and Darlington Railway would benefit the economy.

Members queried the mention of business rates within the Spring Statement which was due to be published on 13 March 2019; Members were in agreement that

business rates did need to change, but that the local authority was limited in what it could do due to the high level of demand led expenditure in the local authority.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received.

(b) That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Cabinet Member with the Economy and Regeneration Portfolio for his informative presentation.

(c) That this Scrutiny Committee be updated on the outcome of the Future High Streets Fund bid.

P35 CENTRAL LIBRARY PROPOSALS

The Assistant Director, Community Services gave a presentation relating to Central Library Proposals.

It was reported that following the decision to keep the main library at Crown Street, and the agreement to invest £2 million in improvements and repairs, a conversation to seek the views of residents had been undertaken and was set to conclude on 15 March 2019.

It was reported that feedback received to date from both the website and various conversation events in respect of services and the building/accessibility had indicated the need for a refurbishment that was sympathetic to the heritage of the Grade II listed building, identified the need for some level of refreshment, expansion of the services of the library including greater activities and events; and that there was a level of conflict in the feedback that required a balanced response.

Members were informed that the feedback from the conversation would be collated along with feedback from the previous consultations, to inform the future Library Plan; and that following approval of this plan the estimated opening date was early 2021.

It was reported that discussions were underway to review the usage of the space at the Dolphin Centre which had been earmarked for the library.

A Member in attendance at the meeting voiced their concern in respect of the absence of consultation to reinstate the mobile library for those members of the public that resided in rural areas; and suggested that the mobile library be reinstated.

Discussion ensued regarding the benefits of Cockerton Library and it was noted that Cockerton Library was used by members of the public from all areas of the town, including rural areas; Members were assured that the home service had been extended to reach residents unable to travel to the library; that no feedback had been received via the library conversations to date in respect of the mobile library. It was suggested that one drawback of Cockerton Library was that it lacked public toilet facilities which constrained the type of events that could be held there and it was requested that this point be included in the conversation feedback.

RESOLVED – That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Assistant Director, Community Services for his informative and interesting presentation.

P36 COMMUNITY SAFETY

The Assistant Director, Community Services gave a presentation (previously circulated) on community safety, detailing the concerns and response of Darlington Borough Council to community safety in Darlington.

Members were advised that a significant reduction in funding had impacted on the co-ordination and leadership of work to keep Darlington a safe place however following consultation as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan, community safety had been identified as a key priority and as a result additional resources had been put in place and the Community Safety Unit established.

Members were advised of the staffing structure within community safety which included Civic Enforcement, Licensing, Private Sector Housing, Trading Standards and Community Resilience. A Systems Data Analyst was also in place to provide accurate and timely data in respect of community safety and had access to Police and Fire data sets, in order to identify threats and risks within communities and to ensure resources were deployed according to those identified threats and risks. Reference was made to the 2019/20 community safety priorities.

Discussion ensued in respect of door to door sales and fly tipping; the importance of residents reporting any concerns to community safety to ensure resources were deployed; knife crime, which was not a concern in Darlington; and that Darlington was a safe and vibrant place to live.

RESOLVED – (a) That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Assistant Director, Community Services for his informative and interesting presentation.

(b) That an update on community safety be provided at a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

P37 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS Q3 2018/19

The Managing Director submitted a report (previously circulated) together with a detailed scorecard (also previously circulated) advising Members of the Quarter 3 performance against those key performance indicators for 2018/19 which were within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee.

It was reported that of the twenty one indicators which were reported either quarterly or six monthly at Quarter 3 and for which there was information available, fifteen had targets and thirteen of these indicators were on target to achieve their year-end target and two were not; six indicators did not have targets however, one was showing performance which was better than the same period last year and four had either no previous data to compare with or no data had been submitted for this quarter, whilst one indicator was showing performance which was worse than the same period last year.

A number of indicators which were showing good performance at Quarter 3 were highlighted in the report, with particular reference made to CUL071 Number of Visits to the Head of Steam which had seen a 22 per cent increase in attendances compared to the same period last year.

Reference was made to CUL030 Total visits to the Dolphin Centre which was showing lower performance due to recording issues, and ENV001 which was not on target to achieve year-end target.

CUL080 Town centre footfall trend showed a decrease, reflecting the national picture. It was highlighted that the data collected from ten electronic counters around the town did not include the sites of Feethams Multi-storey Car Park and Leisure Development and would therefore not record anyone visiting this site.

Reference was made to ECI401 New homes delivered against the five year supply which was showing an increase from the same period last year. National figures had been published for the Housing Delivery Test, a possible additional indicator for this Scrutiny Committee to include, a percentage measurement of the number of net homes delivered the number of homes delivered against the number of homes required. For the period of 2015 to 2018 the required number of homes for Darlington was 572 and it was confirmed that Darlington had delivered 1043, a delivery test measure of 182 per cent.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

P38 WORK PROGRAMME

The Managing Director submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2018/19.

The Lead Officer provided Members with an updated position in relation to individual items within the schedule.

Discussion ensued on the need to convene a Special meeting to give consideration to the updated Local Plan and that this should include the Economic Strategy, Housing Strategy and Car Parking Strategy; the need for an update report on Indoor/Outdoor Market, Rail Heritage; Tees Valley Combined Authority Transport Strategy; as well as updates on Community Safety and Strategic Sites Development Programme.

Reference was made to the intention to convene Special meetings to consider the Performance Indicators on a bi-annual basis.

The Planning Policy Officer updated Members on the current position of Broadband Infrastructure delivery in Darlington and advised that due to complications, the Broadband infrastructure rollout programme had stalled as government were no longer funding Fibre to the cabinet (FTTC). It was reported that work was progressing to identify alternative solutions; that the £350,000 funding from the Tees Valley Combined Authority remained, but that without match funding from the government this would not cover the 3612 premises in Darlington that were without Superfast

Broadband.

Members voiced concern in respect of the future of Broadband in Darlington and agreed that Broadband infrastructure should be a key priority for the town. In light of the update it was agreed that Broadband Infrastructure delivery in Darlington would remain on the work plan for this Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – (a) That the current status of the Work Programme be noted.

(b) That the Work Programme be updated to reflect the decisions of this Scrutiny Committee.