

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL

HOUSING AND MAJOR PROJECTS POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Tuesday, 15th November, 2011

Present:- Councillors Rob Appleyard (Chair), Steve Hedges (Vice-Chair), Barry Macrae, Brian Simmons and Will Sandry

Also in attendance: Derek Quilter (Divisional Director, Project Management, Major Projects), Graham Sabourn (Associate Director for Housing and Health), David Langman (Business Services Manager, Major Projects) and Simon De Beer (Policy & Environment Manager)

22 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

23 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillors Fox and Kew had sent their apologies to the Panel.

25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Councillor Will Sandry declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest in Item 9 (Article 4 Direction on Houses in Multiple Occupation). He stated that he currently owned a home within an area that may possibly become subject to an Article 4 Direction.

26 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

27 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE DEPUTATIONS, STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING

Mr Alex Schlesinger made a statement to the Panel on the subject of Houses in Multiple Occupation. A copy of the statement can be found on the Panel's Minute Book, a summary is set out below.

He stated that he represented the Bath based Small Business Focus. The association is concerned about the possible unintended consequences of the Council taking a more restrictive view of the provision of housing through Houses in Multiple Occupation.

Small Business Focus shares the concerns of B&NES council and the universities that the city is failing to retain its graduates, often through lack of employment opportunities. It is the declared policy of the Council to encourage new businesses in the city, so as to provide the local economy with a broader base than retailing and tourism.

In order to enable and encourage the necessary retention of young people it is essential that they should have somewhere to live, and that they should be able to afford to remain in a city where even the smallest studio flat now costs well over £100, 000, and the rent for a single bedroom flat is in excess of £400 per month.

With no solution to the problem of housing costs apparent, it will be essential for many of these young people to share accommodation, often at a cost of below £300 per month. Without this accommodation being available in sufficient quantity to keep prices relatively low, our most able and best qualified young people will leave Bath for the available opportunities in neighbouring Bristol, where new businesses are being actively encouraged and low cost accommodation is readily available.

We accept that the high concentration of Houses in Multiple Occupation in just a few parts of the city does present problems for these areas. These concentrations, however, do reflect the problems faced by having large areas of Listed Buildings, that are more desirable to the housing market, and therefore more expensive, whilst adaption to the requirements of the Housing Regulations are more difficult, costly and sometimes even impossible in listed buildings.

Whilst management of housing, preferably working through landlords and enlightened application of regulation is desirable, what must be avoided is a policy that leads directly to a reduction of affordable housing for young people, many of whom are just starting on worthwhile careers of self-employment.

Councillor Will Sandry asked if the group had a view on what the Council should be doing to aid young people, not necessarily student and couples and families with housing needs.

Mr Schlesinger replied that the group was relatively new in its origin, but had already identified the need to focus on employment and the retention / provision of housing.

Councillor Barry Macrae commented that he felt that greater student accommodation is required on campus in order to release current HMO's back into regular use. He asked if the group would acknowledge that some form of student accommodation is required.

Mr Schlesinger replied that the group would no doubt support further proposals for student accommodation, but he wished to highlight that the focus should be on retaining graduates through affordable homes.

The Chairman thanked Mr Schlesinger for his statement and asked for it to be passed to the Planning, Transport & Environment Panel prior their debate on the matter on December 6th 2011.

28 MINUTES - 20TH SEPTEMBER 2011

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record and they were duly signed by the Chairman.

29 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

Councillor Cherry Beath, Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development addressed the Panel.

Broadband Delivery UK: She assured the Panel that the Cabinet took a long time in reaching their decision not to proceed with the Government funding offer that was being made available to the West of England authorities of Bath and North East Somerset, South Gloucestershire and Bristol as it must be matched locally. She added that the Cabinet had decided to allocate £25,000 of funding from Development and Regeneration reserves to complete its own Broadband Plan. Councillor Beath indicated that the focus of the Plan should be on Community Hubs, households with no connections and identifying those with the most need.

The Chairman asked for further information of the funding offer.

Councillor Cherry Beath replied that a figure of £1.4m had been offered to Bath and North East Somerset, South Gloucestershire and Bristol and that from that the Council could expect to receive around £690,000. The Council however estimates that it would cost a further £1m to implement the decision.

Public Realm and Highway Improvement Scheme for High Street: She informed the Panel that the Cabinet had decided to proceed with Option 1 which would result in the loss of 1 pay & display space in Terrace Walk. She added that it was the intention to approach traders within the next week regarding consultation.

Development & Regeneration:

- Radstock - Completed and launched the Radstock and Westfield Economic Action Plan
- Midsomer Norton – We have provided supporting information to Midsomer Norton Town Council in their launch of the Somer Valley 100 initiative to promote the largest and fastest growing businesses in the area.
- Bath – Launch of the Enterprise Area at Bath City Riverside
- Planning, Delivering & Financing the Future – a significant workstream being carried out to establish the impact of development upon viability and corporate financing

Enterprise & Business:

- Progressed options analysis on a creative hub for Bath – looking at 10 sites, operational models and finances, including consultation with interested parties. Due to report in January.
- Agreed to fund and lead X Media Lab, the internationally acclaimed creative industries event in Bath from 15th – 18th March showcasing Bath as the cutting edge of digital enterprise

Corporate / Directorate resources, budget & activities:

- Budget Fair - Good stakeholder involvement in Development & Major Projects (D&MP) workshop, showed high level of support for Development & Regeneration agenda
- D&MP have made an interim 'Head of Regeneration' appointment to bring in required skills to support the Development & Regeneration agenda.

Councillor Barry Macrae commented that he could not see the purpose in spending £25,000 on a study into developing broadband access given the likelihood that the study will show that it is necessary.

Councillor Cherry Beath replied that she wished the Council were being offered a more substantial amount. She added that there were concerns as to whether it would be appropriate to accept the offer considering that technology within this area moves so fast.

Councillor Will Sandry asked if the Development and Major Projects department had been assigned the task of making safe and re-opening the Victoria Bridge.

Councillor Cherry Beath replied that discussions were on-going between herself and Councillor Roger Symonds, Cabinet Member for Transport.

Councillor Tim Ball, Cabinet Member for Homes and Planning addressed the Panel.

Bath Western Riverside: 48 affordable homes from the first phase of BWR, including 31 homes for social rent and 17 for shared ownership, have now been successfully allocated. The new tenants include at least 4 homeless households.

In recent months 3 landlords have been successfully prosecuted for failing to meet minimum housing standards. In all three cases fire precautions were inadequate putting tenants at risk. In each case the landlord had refused to cooperate with Housing Services. Fines ranged from £2,000 to £700.

Housing Services has commissioned Bristol Credit Union to undertake the financial transactions associated with our Homefinders Scheme. This has provided a number of benefits for our clients including providing them with independent financial advice, providing a free banking service and housing benefit payment service which pays rent according to tenancy requirements and not according to HB payments.

Housing Services in partnership with South West Homes hosted a Home ownership Roadshow in the Guildhall. The event, which aimed to promote various forms of intermediate housing, such as shared ownership and Firstbuy and other low cost homes was very successful, attracting in excess of 150 visitors.

Councillor Steve Hedges asked the Cabinet Member for his views on Somer having a housing cap set at 35 years of age.

Councillor Tim Ball replied that he was concerned by this fact and was in discussions with Somer on the matter. He added that Somer had set their Affordable Rent Tenancy figure at 80%.

The Chairman commented that all housing providers had been given the choice as to what figure they wished to set.

Councillor Tim Ball replied that it must be made clear to the public what agreements they are entering into.

The Chairman commented that Registered Providers were given direction from the Local Authority as no formal policy was in place. He added that he would welcome such a policy to be brought before the Panel.

On behalf of the Panel the Chairman thanked the Cabinet Members for their update.

30 ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION ON HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION

The Policy & Environment Manager introduced this item to the Panel. He explained that some areas of Bath currently have a high number of Homes in Multiple Occupation (HMO) and that the Planning service had been asked to investigate the positives and negatives of having an Article 4 Direction in place. He added that a study has been commissioned and that the results of it are expected back at the end of this month.

A report outlining the Council's options will be presented to the Planning, Transport & Environment Panel at their meeting on 6th December 2011 and from there it will move to either the Cabinet or the Development Control Committee for a decision.

On reaching a decision to impose an Article 4 Direction the Council is advised to give a 1 year period of notice before any implementation should take place.

Councillor Steve Hedges asked how many Councillors had been approached for their views on this matter.

The Policy & Environment Manager replied that all Bath Councillors had been invited to attend a recent information session.

Councillor Steve Hedges suggested that all Members should be written to so that they could give their views via email.

Councillor Will Sandry commented that while some Local Authorities had been cautious, others had made a direct decision to implement straight away with no or very little period of notice. He asked if the Council would be assessing the work of other Local Authorities.

The Policy & Environment Manager replied that he was aware of around 5 or 6 other Local Authorities that were embarking on the process. He added that Manchester's had only been in place for one month and stated that it was at the Council's discretion as to how much period of notice was given.

Councillor Tim Ball, Cabinet Member for Homes and Planning commented that this was a decision that the Council needed to get right and would advocate a cautious approach. He added that there would be plenty of time for Member input through the consultation process.

The Chairman commented that the same legislation should be applied across the whole of the Council and asked for all Members to be included in any correspondence. He added that he expected a detailed assessment to be carried out as some of the affected houses may have people with learning difficulties within them.

The Policy & Environment Manager replied that an Equalities Impact Assessment was currently being written.

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel thanked him for his update.

31 MEDIUM TERM SERVICE & RESOURCE PLAN

The Divisional Director for Project Management introduced this item to the Panel. He informed them that the report sets the framework for the service planning and budget processes relevant to this Panel for the next 3 years. He added that a budget fair took place on 31st October 2011 and that feedback from the fair has helped inform the draft plan.

He wished to highlight some key points from within the report.

The specific influences on this plan in relation to Development & Major Projects are:

- The need to bring forward Housing Delivery in line with the Core Strategy
- The requirement to initiate development to create growth
- The formation of the West of England (WEP) Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the B&NES Enterprise Area
- The aspiration to develop the digital and creative industries
- The need to facilitate the creation of jobs to address worklessness, particularly among young people
- Delivery of the capital programme and promotion of the council's project management system.

The savings targets for the Directorate for the next 3 years are as follows:

- 2011/12 £0.125m
- 2012/13 £0.095m
- 2013/14 £0.076m

Councillor Will Sandry asked if there was still a plan to reduce the overall number of directorates within the Council to three.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that yes it was still the intention to have three directorates in 2013 – People, Places and Resources.

Councillor Will Sandry commented that he would not want the Cabinet to make any decision in relation to the Article 4 Direction that would have a serious impact on the budget.

The Chairman asked if any savings could be made in the future in relation to office accommodation.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that the directorate may leave Palace Yard Mews in 2013 which is part of the corporate estate.

Councillor Will Sandry commented that he was concerned that the Panel were not scrutinising the Housing Medium Term Plan.

The Chairman replied that currently that responsibility sits with the Wellbeing Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel.

Councillor Barry Macrae asked if the Council was making any progress in relation to the New Homes Bonus.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that the directorate was working with developers to bring sites forward.

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel thanked the officers for their report and acknowledged that they would be in receipt of the Service Action Plan in January 2012.

32 HOUSING & MAJOR PROJECTS UPDATE

The Divisional Director for Project Management introduced this item to the Panel. He highlighted some of the key points from within the report.

Somerdale

- Kraft continue to analyse the bids for the Somerdale site - a decision as to their preferred developer has not yet been made. An announcement is imminent.

Radstock Infrastructure Project:

- At the Cabinet meeting on 14th September members decided to postpone their decision on the Traffic Regulation Orders for the proposed highway improvements in Radstock. The Cabinet asked highway officers to review the objections to the TROs, look again at the traffic data and, in the light of this information and the many changes that have been suggested to the current proposal, see if the scheme can be further amended to maintain traffic flows and pedestrian movements through the town.
- The funding from the Housing & Communities Association (HCA) is conditional in that it must be used within this financial year.

The Chairman asked if the highway officers were aware of the HCA funding.

The Divisional Director for Project Management assured the Panel that they were.

Councillor Barry Macrae commented that he wished the Cabinet Member to pursue this decision actively.

Victoria Bridge

Stage 1

- Emergency monitoring instructed to be undertaken weekly.
- Gateway review completed 3rd October 2011
- Feasibility study incorporating a 3 stage action plan has been signed off by Strategic Director of Service Delivery.

Stage 2

- Commence the Temporary works
- Design commence November 2011
- Tenders to be issued early December 2011

Permanent works

- Design commence January 2012
- Works due for completion Autumn 2013

A structural analysis was undertaken by Fenton Holloway and completed on 6th September 2011. It has been noted that the structure is in a worse condition than previously reported, however weekly inspections of the cracked members can provide a degree of mitigation to sudden collapse until the temporary works is installed. A programme to reopen the bridge for public access in the spring has been proposed.

Councillor Will Sandry commented that he was delighted that the Development & Major Projects directorate had taken a lead role on this matter.

Mr David Redgewell addressed the Panel. He requested that an Equalities Impact Assessment in relation to Southgate be published. He added that further bus shelter provision is required and that the issue of access to the bus station from the train station needs to be assessed.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that the directorate manages the implementation of the approved planning scheme. He added that Multi has the right to apply for changes to the scheme through the planning process.

The Associate Director for Housing and Health addressed the Panel in relation to the Housing Services section of the report.

Home Improvement Agency Re-commission (HIA)

Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset & South Gloucestershire are undertaking the joint commissioning of a single Home Improvement Agency for the sub-region. HIAs help vulnerable people live independently by providing housing related support, such as minor repairs, handyman services, adaptations and advice. The core customer groups for HIAs are disabled, elderly and otherwise vulnerable households across all tenures, although the focus is on owner occupiers. The service is means tested: provided free to those on benefits, with a modest charge levied for those who can pay. HIAs also provide services through self-funding options to non-vulnerable households.

A twelve week consultation period will be undertaken from the beginning of October in accordance with local authority compacts. This will include public availability of the commissioning strategy and equality impact assessment, the opportunity to feedback through an online survey, local stakeholder drop in events and a single market providers' day. The consultation feedback will be used to draw up the tender specification. The tender will then be advertised at the beginning of February with a contract award anticipated in by mid-June 2012.

Home Energy Efficiency

Joint working between Housing Services and the Public Health Team at NHS BANES resulted in the Council's Warm Streets home energy efficiency scheme being promoted with this year's Flu Jab mail out to over 36,000 residents over 60 years of age.

At the time of writing this had resulted in 822 referrals for loft or cavity wall insulation. This may increase further in the weeks ahead. Past experience would suggest that this is likely to result in at least half as many actual installed after a follow up survey by the contractor. Improving the energy efficiency of these homes has the potential to provide vulnerable residents the triple benefit of:

- Better health through warmer homes
- Lower fuel bills
- Lower carbon emissions to help reduce climate change

Access to Housing Advice & Options

Housing Services are now able to provide clients with daily appointments to provide a full housing advice and options interview over the phone. Users receive a return call from the adviser at an agreed time, and advice given will be backed up with written information. The new appointments ensure that people in isolated and rural locations are not excluded from the service, and reduce the need to travel. This is in addition to the housing advice and options services operated from the Guildhall, The Hollies and Keynsham Town Council Offices.

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel thanked the officers for their report.

33 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Chairman introduced this item to the Panel.

Councillor Barry Macrae requested that the actions from the Panel 'Away Day' be appended to the Workplan report at the January meeting so that they can be publicly approved.

The Panel agreed with this proposal.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services