

## **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET**

### **HOUSING AND MAJOR PROJECTS POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

Tuesday, 17th September, 2013

**Present:-** Councillors Nathan Hartley (Chair), Steve Hedges, Brian Simmons, Gerry Curran and June Player

**Also in attendance:** Derek Quilter (Divisional Director for Project Management), Graham Sabourn (Head of Housing) and Jessica Turner (Project Co-ordinator)

#### **14 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **15 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillor Ben Stevens, Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development sent his apologies to the Panel.

#### **17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

#### **18 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN**

There was none.

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

David Redgewell made a statement to the Panel. He said that he was happy to report that the bus stops outside the train station were now operational, all of the signalled pedestrian crossings were working and the disabled toilets within the bus station were now accessible. He commented that it remained a minefield to resolve issues at the stations due to their convoluted management set-up and wished to thank the Chief Executive of the Council for her help in finding solutions to the problems he had raised.

The Chairman thanked him for his statement and asked for the minutes of the meeting to be passed to the Cabinet Member for Transport and the Chair of the Planning, Transport & Environment Panel.

## **20 MINUTES - 23RD JULY 2013**

Councillor June Player asked for her apologies to be recorded for the meeting on July 23<sup>rd</sup> 2013.

The Panel were unable to confirm the minutes of the previous meeting and asked that they be deferred until the next meeting.

## **21 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE**

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

### **Customer Excellence Standard**

He said that Housing Services had achieved the Customer Excellence Standard for the third consecutive year. He commented that achieving the standard was important because it demonstrated to the service, partners and customers that they place a lot of importance on getting things right for customers.

He added that the assessor found clear evidence that Housing Services actively use the Standard as a tool for continuous improvement. She said that the consultation on proposals for an Additional Licensing Scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation was an excellent example of how they are using customer insight to inform policy and strategy. She also praised the proactive approach taken in reviewing the 'Homesearch' Scheme which has led to considerable all round benefits and noted that across the whole service they put customers first.

### **Energy@Home Starter Project**

He advised the panel of a new initiative by Housing services and partners, known as the Energy@Home Starter Project which aims to improve the energy efficiency of a number of homes across B&NES and is expected to run until August 2014.

The project includes grants towards solid wall insulation in parts of Twerton and Southdown and fully funded basic heating and insulation measures for residents on certain benefits across the Authority. The majority of funding for the project comes from a £200,000 grant from Scottish and Southern Energy Company which is targeted on the 15% most deprived areas in the Country – hence the focus on parts of Twerton & Southdown.

### **Housing Prosecutions**

Housing Services recently prosecuted three landlords. The prosecutions were as a result of Council inspections which uncovered poor property conditions for tenants, dangerous fire precautions, inadequate heating, broken window panes, and mould, amongst many other problems. Bath Magistrates handed out a combined total of

£16,500 worth of fines and costs against the landlords. So far this year Housing Services have now prosecuted 6 landlords and given 2 simple cautions, which used to be known as a formal caution. This clearly demonstrates the Council's commitment to the national campaign of stamping out rogue landlords that the Council recently signed up to.

### **Homelessness Figures**

He commented that colleagues may have read in the national press the number of homeless households placed in temporary accommodation by English Councils has increased by around 9% in the last year. He was pleased to confirm that this Council had not experienced this trend and indeed numbers had actually dropped. He informed them that while the national rate of households in temporary accommodation is 2.49 households in temporary accommodation per 1,000 households, the rate in Bath & North East Somerset the rate is only 0.27 households. He said he would be keeping a close eye on these figures and would provide further updates if required.

Councillor Nathan Hartley asked if an update was available regarding the Core Strategy.

Councillor Tim Ball replied that the Inspector was to be provided with information on the 5 prospective Green Field sites. He added these were in South Stoke, Weston, Whitchurch and Keynsham (x2).

Councillor Nathan Hartley asked what the next stages in the process were.

Councillor Tim Ball replied that the Inspector was due to report next week if he felt the planned hearings for November / December could take place. He added that he hoped to be in a position to bring the matter back to Full Council in January.

Councillor Nathan Harley asked for a brief update on the issue of Empty Homes.

The Head of Housing replied that at the start of this piece of work there were around 650 – 700 properties identified and that the figure now has reduced to around 500. He added that due to a change in the way Council Tax data is recorded it was only now possible to collect information on properties that had been empty for two years.

Councillor Nathan Hartley asked for Councillor Ball to send his update to the Democratic Services Officer and suggested that Chairs and Vice-Chairs discuss the matter of Cabinet Member Updates further at their next meeting.

## **22 LOWER BRISTOL ROAD GYPSY & TRAVELLERS SITE UPDATE**

The Cabinet Member for Homes & Planning, Councillor Tim Ball gave an update to the Panel regarding this item. He stated though that this would be the last time he would do so as he would take any further updates solely to the Planning, Transport & Environment Scrutiny Panel.

He said that progress was being made and that an application relating to the site was nearing completion. He informed them that after further surveys were carried out

relating to the contours of the site and the need for vehicle turning space the application that will be submitted will be for five permanent pitches and 5 transit pitches.

He added that the Council had a legal responsibility for two families on site and that if possible the intention was to let them remain on the site whilst it is under development.

Councillor Nathan Hartley asked if any other sites had come forward.

Councillor Tim Ball replied that another site for two pitches had been proposed in Whitchurch.

Councillor Steve Hedges asked why the Council was not responsible for the other people on the site.

Councillor Tim Ball replied that there were very specific legal categories that the travellers had to be in to remain on the site. He added that a further survey of occupants would take place next week.

## **23 PROJECT DELIVERY UPDATE**

The Divisional Director for Project Management introduced this item to the Panel.

Councillor Steve Hedges commented that he felt that the bollards that were in place on the road at St. Gregory's while the new 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre was under construction worked really and would like to see them in place permanently.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that the main bollard was now in place on site and that the school was meeting with officers from Highways to discuss further options.

Councillor June Player asked why only a temporary measure appeared to be in place for the disabled access between Bath Western Riverside and the car park of Homebase.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that he would ask an officer to approach Crest on the matter.

Councillor June Player asked for best practise to be carried out during the next phase of the site, especially with regard to Curo properties.

Councillor Gerry Curran replied that the Council should be mindful of these issues when the reserve matters are brought before them.

He then wished to comment on the Bath Flood Mitigation. He commented that the removal of trees should always be considered the last resort in this process.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that he was conscious of that and the team were working with ecologists to limit this.

Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones commented that some concern had been raised in Keynsham about a possible surge there due to the measures proposed for Bath.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that there should not be any concerns over a possible surge as the Environment Agency will not accept any measures unless they are completely satisfied. He added the planning application was due towards the end of 2013.

He said that as part of the Keynsham Regeneration Project a new consultation was underway to find a public piece of art with a steering group made up of members of the public.

Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones asked how many accesses were planned for the Somerdale site.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that an application was due before the Development Control Committee later in the month and that one access to the site would be requested.

Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones suggested that the homes planned on the former MoD sites should be built to a higher density.

Councillor Gerry Curran replied that that was a matter for the Local Development Framework Steering Group.

Councillor Steve Hedges commented that if the density was increased by 10% it would alleviate the need to use some of the proposed Green Field sites.

## **24 LONDON ROAD REGENERATION**

The Project Co-ordinator for London Road Regeneration introduced this item to the Panel. She informed them that in June 2012 the Cabinet approved the project framework and governance structure for a £750,000 London Road Regeneration Project. She added that in 2013 an additional £250,000 was allocated to the project, this had been provisionally allocated in the 2014/15 budget, but was re-phased for 2013/14 to enable spend in line with the project programme.

In April 2012 the Gateway Group was formed, it includes local residents, representatives from the local business community and the two ward members. The group proposed two schemes to the project team, a landscaping scheme and a property improvement grant scheme. These schemes were both agreed for progression.

Councillor Nathan Hartley asked if there was a completion date for the project.

The Project Co-ordinator replied that the project had now entered the detailed design phase and that work was due on site in mid-January. She added that work was scheduled to take approximately five months to complete.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that there was no timeframe for the completion of the project in terms of spending the funds.

Councillor Gerry Curran asked if there had been a good take up of the property improvement grant scheme.

The Project Co-ordinator replied that 24 grants have been offered.

Councillor Gerry Curran commented that he hoped people would not be put off by the fact they would have to gain Listed Building Consent. He also asked if they anticipated much traffic disruption was anticipated.

The Project Co-ordinator replied that a dedicated Listed Buildings Officer had been assigned to the project to deal with queries from the public. She added that works involving the road will look to avoid peak hours.

**25 COUNCIL LAND AVAILABILITY**

This report was deferred to a future meeting.

**26 PANEL WORKPLAN**

The Chairman introduced this item to the Panel. He suggested that the Homeseach Update be moved from future items to the November meeting.

The other members of the Panel agreed with this proposal.

The meeting ended at 7.20 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**