

## **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL**

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

Tuesday, 20th September, 2011

**Present:-** Councillors Rob Appleyard (Chair), Steve Hedges (Vice-Chair), Barry Macrae, Paul Fox, Patrick Anketell-Jones (In place of Les Kew) and Neil Butters (In place of Will Sandry)

**Also in attendance:** John Betty (Strategic Director, Development & Major Projects), Derek Quilter (Divisional Director, Project Management Major Projects), Graham Sabourn (Associate Director (Housing and Health) B&NES), David Langman (Business Services Manager Major Projects) and John Wilkinson (Economic Enterprise & Business Development Manager)

#### **11 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **12 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillors Kew, Sandry and Simmons had sent their apologies to the Panel. Councillor Anketell-Jones was present as a substitute for Councillor Kew and Councillor Butters was present as a substitute for Councillor Sandry.

#### **14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

There were none.

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

There was none.

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

There were none.

## **17 MINUTES - 2ND AUGUST 2011**

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

## **18 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE**

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

Homeless Provision: He informed the Panel that several meetings had taken place recently with Julian House and he hoped to be able to update them further in the coming months.

Travellers Site: He stated he had been working on a policy that would enable an actual site to be provided and that it was his intention to have the policy in place as soon as the democratic process will allow. A site currently within the Green Belt is under consideration and funding for the site is being investigated.

Councillor Steve Hedges asked for an assurance that the current policy will be appropriately amended.

Councillor Tim Ball replied that he would bring a full report to the November meeting of the Panel in the hope that he could make the site come to fruition inside 12 months.

The Chairman wished to congratulate him on his work so far relating to the travellers site and reminded him of the upcoming Hostel Review that had been agreed at the recent Policy Development & Scrutiny Chair's meeting.

Councillor Tim Ball replied that he welcomed the review.

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

Keynsham Regeneration: She wished to highlight that the consultation process would begin on September 26<sup>th</sup>.

Radstock Economic Forum: She had attended a very positive meeting recently which had produced a very helpful ongoing schedule.

Radstock Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO): A decision on this proposal has been deferred to give time to assess all of the comments that have been received.

Sustainable Economic Development: Financial models will be drafted for the Enterprise Area. She acknowledged that the Enterprise Zone was a big magnet and that the Council was doing its best to retain as many businesses as possible.

Councillor Steve Hedges commented that the concerns of the public in relation to the Radstock TROs should be addressed as much as possible.

Councillor Cherry Beath replied that the solution needs to be viable to bring forward regeneration which is why she was looking at possible amendments.

The Chairman commented that the road works that had been in place over the past two weekends were a prime example of how important signage will be if the TROs do proceed. He called for adequate signage to be on all roads and well in advance of Radstock. He also posed the question of whether any of the TRO work could take place at night without too much disturbance.

Councillor Barry Macrae said that he agreed with the comments made by the Chairman and added that the traders within Radstock who will lose income as a result of the works must be taken into account. He also urged the Cabinet Member to accommodate skills where they lie and to encourage businesses to set up in areas where a knowledge base already existed.

The Panel thanked them both for their updates.

## 19 HOUSING & MAJOR PROJECTS UPDATE

The Strategic Director for Development & Major Projects introduced this item to the Panel. He highlighted some of the key points from the beginning of the report.

**Housing Delivery** – The Council has published a Core Strategy which seeks to provide 11,000 new homes in B&NES by 2026. This will require a step change in annual delivery rates over the plan period from 393 per annum (2006-2011) to achieve the required average of 550 pa. (Core Strategy Target 2006-2026). These figures are challenging, but sites are currently being progressed.

A brief review of the current arrangements within the council has been commissioned by SDG. The report will cover the capabilities and effectiveness of the organisation and the capacity currently in place and will recommend actions necessary to ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach across the council and accountable to the Strategic Director of Development and Major Projects.

The Chairman asked if work was ongoing to find potential new sites.

The Strategic Director for Development & Major Projects replied that yes work was ongoing to find appropriate opportunities on more modest sites. He added that to gain the maximum potential from the New Homes Bonus it would be beneficial to build sooner rather than later.

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

Councillor Steve Hedges asked for an update on the Council's position relating to the compulsory purchase of empty properties.

The Associate Director for Housing and Health replied that the Revenues and Benefits team had advised that according to their records there are 500 properties that had been empty for more than six months. He then added that officers within his team had, following visits to these properties, reduced the list to 100 properties that

are empty and have been so for more than a year, with another 100 that are probably empty and also have been for more than one year. The remaining properties were either not empty or had been empty for less than 1 year. From this list, 8 properties have been identified as high priority properties that should be pursued with formal action.

Councillor Neil Butters asked how many of the eight properties they hoped to have in use within a year and if there was a timeline for the process.

The Associate Director for Housing and Health replied that the Council would be lucky to bring forward one property within a year, given that advice from other authorities suggests that legal action can be both time consuming and potentially very expensive.

Councillor Steve Hedges commented that the Council should examine the approach taken by Brighton Council. He stated that following one compulsory purchase, thirty other properties were worked upon very swiftly by their landlords.

The Associate Director for Housing and Health addressed the Panel on the matter of Housing Services. He informed them that the Localism Bill was expected to receive Royal Assent in November and will introduce a number of housing reforms and flexibilities which will affect some of the Council's housing activities around homelessness, housing allocations and tenancies. One of the key proposals is the requirement that Councils produce a 'Strategic Tenancy Policy' (STP) which Registered Providers of social housing (RPs) "are to have regard in formulating policies".

The STP should articulate the Councils view on the kind of tenancies that RPs should use and how they should be operated. There may be merits in using the STP as a vehicle to articulate a more comprehensive view of the Council's housing policies, including guiding principles, RP asset management, housing allocation priorities, housing advice and how it will monitor and review the policy.

A future report, later in the financial year, will bring the proposed STP and housing allocations policy to this panel.

The proposed housing changes include:

- Introducing the option to offer social tenants flexible tenancies and at a rent of up to 80% of local market rents, known as Affordable Rent.
- Allowing significantly greater freedoms for the Council to decide who is eligible to join the housing waiting list & how they are prioritised.
- A requirement to produce and publish an STP which RPs "are to have regard in formulating policies". The STP should articulate the Councils view on the kind of tenancies that RPs should use and how they should be operated.
- Abolition of Housing Revenue Account, which although a significant change has no effect for 'Large Scale Voluntary Transfer' LSVT authorities such as Bath & North East Somerset which no longer own their own stock.
- Enabling authorities to discharge their homelessness duty through accommodating a household in the private rented sector.

Councillor Paul Fox asked if additional funds are received by a Registered Provider how are they monitored.

The Associate Director for Housing and Health replied that the Homes & Communities Agency has a process to ensure funds are used for deliverability.

Councillor Barry Macrae thanked the Associate Director for Housing and Health for his explanation on the current challenges facing the department. He added that he believed Councillor Ball had a large problem to address within this area and asked him to bring his priorities back to the Panel.

The Strategic Director for Development & Major Projects addressed the Panel in relation to the overview of the department.

### **Affording the Future**

- The Council needs to understand the impact of the new financial regimes brought in by Government, which moving forward place more emphasis on delivering housing and employment growth, and how these might impact on the Authorities revenue and capital funding streams.

### **City of Ideas & Enterprise Area**

- Earlier in the year, the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) determined that Bristol Temple Quarter would be given a new designation as an Enterprise Zone. This means Bristol City Council will need to produce a Local Development Order outlining how they will encourage business to locate there through relaxing planning rules.
- The Government will also offer a business rate holiday for new businesses starting in the zone and allow the LEP to retain business rates from new businesses. As part of this agreement the 4 Enterprise Areas within the West of England have also been agreed. One of these is Bath City Riverside.
- This designation means that these areas will be the first to benefit from some of the financial gains from business rate retention accrued from the Bristol Temple Quarter Enterprise Zone. A Memorandum of Understanding between the Local Authorities is currently being prepared to articulate exactly how this will work.

Work has started to articulate the scope of the Bath Enterprise Area. Key activities have been:

- Starting the development of a financial model to establish the overall viability of the Enterprise Area. This will be based on an examination of all available and potential funding mechanisms (e.g. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), New Homes Bonus, Tax Increment Finance, leverage, feed in tariffs etc). This work will start in September and report later in the year.

Councillor Martin Veal addressed the Panel and proceeded to ask the following questions.

He asked if Council officers would now take on board the issue of cellar degradation within the London Road area as part of the Regeneration Action Plan with a view to the results informing and empowering the debate on traffic, weight limits and HGV's

using the London Road to transit Bath. He suggested that as the Council owns the freehold of three buildings in the area – numbers 2, 3, and 4 Long Acre that this would be a good place to start.

The Strategic Director for Development & Major Projects replied that the request will be taken on board by officers and added that any decision should be looked at in parallel to consideration of the overall regeneration and community needs of the London Road, and the sustainability and deliverability of any proposal.

Councillor Martin Veal asked how does the consultation on the Visitor Accommodation Study address the significant body of opinion that through the planning process and its inadequacies Bath could end up with a series of down market bucket shops and cheap bed hotels that will do little to maintain the high quality of visitor attractions, shops and leisure facilities that the city offers.

The Strategic Director for Development & Major Projects replied that hotel quality is not a matter that is within the control of Planning Policy and assured Councillor Veal that planning officers will keep monitoring developments.

Councillor Martin Veal asked why the workings of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) were not scheduled for transparent scrutiny and called upon the Panel to scrutinise the LEP Business Plan to ensure it is within our Core Strategy, our core values and the priorities of our residents.

The Strategic Director for Development & Major Projects replied that he represents the Council as lead officer on the LEP Project Team and subject to receiving advice saw no reason why the Business Plan could not be brought to the Panel.

Councillor Martin Veal asked who will be leading on the 'active engagement of sector sub groups e.g. Tourism', who will they be reporting to and will their reports be referred to the Panel. He added that whoever represents the 'active engagement' must have a qualified and strategic awareness of the tourism offer and requirement of Bath & North East Somerset or very quickly Bath's unique tourism offer and delivery will be subsumed by an inferior global Bristol offer. Destination Bristol has less than half the membership of Bath Tourism Plus and covers not only twice the number of businesses but twice the area and over twice the budget. He stated he was very worried that the Council would shrink from the challenge of the LEP and that this in turn would be to the benefit of Greater Bristol and their inferior offer.

The Strategic Director for Development & Major Projects replied that currently it had been officers that have attended meetings, not Members and that he had been involved in two reporting sectors, namely construction and retail and tourism.

The Business Support and Development Manager added that Mary Lynch from Bath Tourism Plus currently sits on the LEP Board.

Councillor Barry Macrae commented that he felt that as Midsomer Norton had now been installed with High Speed Broadband as a result of a government grant that more businesses should be encouraged to start up / move to the area.

Councillor Neil Butters commented that he wished for this to be expanded to the villages of the Council such as Wellow.

The Economic Enterprise & Business Development Manager addressed the Panel on the matter of Business Support. He informed them that through monitoring of the 2011/12 SLA it shows that in quarter 1 BusinessWest provided advice to 500 pre-start and established businesses and recorded 43 new business starts and are currently on track to exceed the annual targets under the Agreement. He added that the Council are continuing to work with BusinessWest on the implications of the closure of the regional Business Link offices in November 2011 and how this will affect service delivery under the SLA. To assess the future priorities for business support an Evaluation Report is being commissioned which will look at the demand for and effectiveness of business support services and inform any continued Council support for service delivery.

Councillor Barry Macrae stated that he wished for Evaluation Report to be shared with the Panel.

The Economic Enterprise & Business Development Manager replied that it was likely he would be able to produce the report for the January meeting of the Panel.

Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones asked for a brief update on the regeneration of Keynsham Town Hall.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that the department were currently preparing a planning application with a view to presenting a report to Cabinet in December.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report and thanked all the officers present for their contributions to the debate.

## **20 DELIVERING SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH IN B&NES**

The Economic Enterprise & Business Development Manager introduced this item to the Panel. He explained that the format of the report forms a potential skeleton of the Cabinet paper that they will receive in November. He highlighted that there was a risk that without intervention, at current levels of economic performance, the Council will not create the level of job growth that is planned for by the Core Strategy. He added that the area's current economic performance shows that if it continued into the future at current rates that not enough jobs, particularly of the target quality, will be created for local people.

He also wished to set out some real strengths of the area and potential future actions.

### **Strengths**

- A highly skilled workforce, with world class Higher Education provision focussed on growth sectors
- Clusters of highly productive businesses, many of them identified as key sectors in driving the UK's economic recovery

- Public sector and tourism jobs providing a backbone to the local economy and a steady flow of income somewhat protected from recession and international competition
- Once they start, very good business survival rates indicating a strong underlying economy

### **Potential future actions**

- Ensure the District has an attractive profile and strong competitive identity to attract inward investment in accordance with the Bath and North East Somerset Economic Strategy
- Ensure there is a regulatory, finance and support environment which enables existing businesses to develop and grow
- Ensure there is sufficient and appropriate employment space available for local job creation, building on the opportunity of the Bath Enterprise Area but also focussed on local neighbourhoods outside Bath
- Ensure there are sufficient and appropriate homes built to provide accommodation for people taking up these new jobs as set out in the Core Strategy, including university graduates
- Ensure that the transport, communications and cultural infrastructure supports the delivery of the above

Councillor Barry Macrae commented that he felt that most of the important issues were covered within the report and he urged that Cabinet to carry out the implementation as soon as possible.

Councillor Paul Fox commented that he acknowledged that something needs to be done and said that any growth must be sustainable. He called for key employment space / business accommodation to be identified and asked what the Council could do to aid this. He also stated that B&NES should not have an inferiority complex regarding Bristol and the LEP as it should be seen as an opportunity.

The Chairman commented that he felt that sites should be identified so that businesses can have the ability to expand.

Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones commented that taking forward proposals for a creative/digital “hub” workspace for co-location of creative companies was a sound proposition for the future.

Councillor Steve Hedges commented that he felt that the report should be written with more confidence. He also called for the former Clark’s site to be promoted further as part of the solution.

Councillor Paul Fox stated the need for Bath to get itself onto the Cities Map as they are seen as the drivers for growth.



The Chairman commented that mobility and public transport were both important issues that should be considered. He added that the Panel should also have a role in how money in relation to the New Homes Bonus is spent.

The Strategic Director for Development & Major Projects commented that the Government currently sees the West of England and Bristol as a priority. He called for the Council to be bold and to make the relationship work by showing them a credible offer of our own.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to commend the report to the Cabinet.

## **21 PANEL WORKPLAN**

The Chairman introduced this item to the Panel. He proposed that prior to the next meeting the Panel has an 'Away Day' to discuss the Medium Term Service and Resource Plans and the future priorities of the Panel.

The Panel agreed with this proposal and set a provisional date of Friday 11<sup>th</sup> November, 3.00pm.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**