

SELECT COMMITTEE
ON REGENERATION, CULTURE AND
ADULT EDUCATION

Wednesday, 5th March, 2008 at 6.00 pm
in Committee Room 3 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor C Wilson (Chairman)
Councillor Mottram (Vice Chairman)
Councillors Crumpton, Jackson, Jones, Rahman, Southall, Tomkinson,
K Turner, Tyler and Woodall

Officers

Assistant Director Housing Strategy and Private Sector (Lead Officer to the Committee), Senior Assistant Director of Finance (Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement), Assistant Director of Finance (ICT and Business Transformation), Assistant Director Libraries, Archives and Lifelong Learning, General Manager Planning, Principal Planning Policy Manager, Head of Economic Regeneration Delivery, Economic Regeneration Co-ordinator, Economic Intelligence Officer, Head of Personnel and Principal Personnel Officer (Directorate of the Urban Environment), Head of Policy and Principal Policy and Performance Management Officer (Chief Executives Directorate) and Mr J Jablonski (Directorate of Law & Property)

together with members of the public.

60

COMMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN

On the occasion of the last scheduled meeting of the Committee in the current municipal year the Chairman thanked members for their attendance and participation in the business of the Committee.

61

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Members declared personal interests in the matters referred to on the Agenda, as follows:-

- (a) Councillor Crumpton – Agenda item 14 – Update on Insurance Arrangements for Community Groups – in that he is a trustee of Wollescote and Cradley Community Association.
- (b) Councillors Southall and C Wilson – in the following matters arising from their membership of the Development Control Committee and, as appropriate, they did not take part in the discussion on the relevant matters:-

- (i) Agenda item 6 – Developments in Coseley – in view of possible future determinations as members of the Development Control Committee.
 - (ii) Agenda item 9 – Dudley Borough Economic Strategy – any references to the Crown Centre, Stourbridge in view of possible future determinations as members of the Development Control Committee.
 - (iii) Agenda item 10 – Progress Report on Regeneration of Stourbridge – in view of any possible future determinations as members of the Development Control Committee.
 - (iv) Agenda item 11 – Planning Application Statistics Relating to Affordable Housing and Apartment Developments – as members of the Development Control Committee involvement in the decision making process producing the statistics under consideration.
 - (v) Agenda item 12 – presentation on the Joint Core Strategy – any references to new build and densities as related to Dudley Borough in respect of future applications that may appear before the Development Control Committee a Committee on which the members serve.
- (c) Councillor K Turner – a personal and prejudicial interest in respect of Agenda item 9 – Dudley Borough Economic Strategy – relating to any reference to Castle Hill as he is a Trustee of Dudley Zoo.
- (d) Councillor D Tyler –in Agenda item 9 – Dudley Borough Economic Strategy – relating to any reference to the Castle Hill project as he is a Trustee of Dudley Zoo.

62

MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16th January, 2008, be approved as a correct record and signed.

63

CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

RESOLVED

That the Agenda items numbered 9 (Dudley Borough Economic Strategy) and 12 (Presentation on the Joint Core Strategy) be considered as the next items of business.

64

DUDLEY BOROUGH ECONOMIC STRATEGY

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the Council's Economic Strategy which was being updated for 2008/09.

Lynne Avery and Colin Hill (Economic Intelligence Officer and Economic Regeneration Co-ordinator) Directorate of the Urban Environment gave a presentation on the Economic Strategy as part of the consultation process on the draft 2008/09 Strategy the consultation on which had begun in February, 2008.

The Officers' presentation included the background and context to the strategy as well as indicating key facts and figures and challenges.

As part of the updating process a review of what had been achieved in the past twelve months had been undertaken and the details given in paragraph 9 of the report submitted were highlighted and commented upon. Also commented upon were some of the plans emerging for 2008/09 onwards to be included in the Strategy's action plan as indicated in paragraph 10 of the report submitted.

Following the consultation period the final strategy would be reported to the Cabinet at their meeting to be held on 19th March, 2008 with submission to full Council thereafter.

Arising from the presentation given Members asked a number of questions and queried aspects reported on including the support given to existing businesses; the need for affordable child childcare and a request that a sliding scale of charges for this be investigated; a query as to the Metro development; the perceived need for alternatives to be developed to the Metro in terms of infrastructure with a further query as to the inclusion of the Building Schools for the Future programme. The need for improved public transport and the easing of traffic problems relating to issues around climate change were also raised.

In response to queries it was reported that the full Strategy document did include reference to the Metro and to the Building Schools for the Future programme. There was also recognition of the issues raised regarding traffic congestion and climate change and these latter issues would be looked at in the context of the next generation Local Area Agreement.

At the conclusion of questions and responses an indication was given that the points made would be considered as part of the consultation process on the draft 2008/09 strategy.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and presentation given, on the 2008/09 update on the Dudley Borough Economic Strategy, as part of the consultation process on that strategy, be noted and that the comments made at this meeting be taken forward in the update of the Strategy to the Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration.

65

PRESENTATION ON A JOINT CORE STRATEGY FOR THE BLACK COUNTRY – PREFERRED OPTIONS

The Principal Planning Policy Manager (Annette Roberts) gave a presentation on preferred options in respect of a Joint Core Strategy for the Black Country. Details of the presentation to be given had previously been circulated to members of the Committee.

In making her presentation she indicated that the presentation was in advance of the formal consultation period which would be for the statutory six weeks commencing on 17th March, 2008.

This presentation therefore sought to give Members advance notice of aspects of the content of the Strategy.

It was noted that all Members of the Committee would shortly receive a copy of the Joint Core Strategy document on which their comments would be invited in particular on the questions contained therein which would be signposted for the benefit of Members.

Members would also be asked to forward their comments to the Principal Planning Policy Manager so that she could prepare a response, in consultation with the Chairman of this Committee, so that the responses would then form part of the consultation process and be recorded as the views of this Select Committee.

Arising from the presentation given, which included reference to the five Regeneration Corridors which were wholly or in part within the area of the Borough, Members made a number of comments and queries regarding the details shown on the various plans submitted relating to the Regeneration Corridors and the impact the proposals may have as regards housing development and employment sites; concerns about the type of housing that might be provided on designated sites and the need for plans contained in the Strategy document to be in colour together with an indication of the physical space in terms of hectares for proposed development sites. In respect of Regeneration Corridor 16 - Preferred Option Tipton – Coseley, further details in respect of the 871 dwellings indicating the types and ranges was requested.

In response to comments made the Principal Planning Policy Manager indicated that when Members received their copy of the Strategy document the points made will have been taken on board and would also include narrative on each of the five regeneration corridors affecting the Borough. Similar information would also be contained in the documents to be prepared for the wider public consultation. She also indicated that a number of the points raised were covered in the full Strategy document including the assurance given at the meeting that there would not be any development on green-belt or greenfield sites in the Borough.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the presentation given, and in the responses to questions and queries raised, be noted and that the comments made at this meeting be taken into account when Members of this Committee receive their copy of the Joint Core Strategy for the Black Country document as part of the consultation process to be undertaken.

PUBLIC FORUM

Mr Brian Guest of the Friends of Mount Pleasant School again raised the issue of the costings requested previously.

In response to the question raised the Assistant Director Libraries, Archives and Lifelong Learning reported that the report submitted to the meeting of Cabinet on 12th September, 2007, in connection with the proposal to relocate the Dudley Archives and Local History Service to a site on or near the Black Country Living Museum through the development of a partnership with Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and the Museum, contained details of indicative costs. It was further indicated that a feasibility study of October 2006 had indicated that the cost of providing a modern archive service for the Council would be in the order of £5million. The cost of a joint facility as now proposed would be established arising from an updated feasibility study to be undertaken.

The Assistant Director Libraries, Archives and Lifelong Learning also reiterated points made in that report regarding the unsuitability of the Mount Pleasant Site for continued use by the service in terms of its limited capacity and inability to meet requirements of the National Archives in relation to BS5454.

The costs of the current proposal were therefore not yet available as the feasibility study had not been completed. That study would however provide a cost basis for the provision of a modern archive service in the Borough.

The Officer also stated that retaining the Mount Pleasant Site would give rise to additional costs over and above those of relocation relating to the movement of the archives and disruption to service. Furthermore, the capital receipt from the sale of the existing site in Mount Pleasant would not be available to help offset the costs of the new provision.

In response to comments made the officer confirmed that the current site was not viable as the future site for the service as it was not capable of meeting the requirements of BS5454. National Archives had also agreed that this was the case given for example the need to provide for 15 to 20 years of accrual of material.

In response to further questions asked it was confirmed that currently the cost of the new provision proposed was not known as the feasibility study have not been completed and that the current Mount Pleasant site could not be brought up to the requirements of BS5454.

The information given above was queried by Mr Guest and Members of the Committee with comments made on the need to retain resources in Coseley.

Arising from further comments made in respect of costings some of which were referred to in the report submitted to the meeting of the Cabinet in September, 2007, it was again reiterated that the Mount Pleasant Site was not viable as the future home for the Dudley Archives and Local History Service.

At the conclusion of questions and responses Mr Guest asked that the Council allow an independent assessment of the school to be undertaken as to its suitability for modification and maintenance of the archive and local history service together with costings. This query would be conveyed to the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services for consideration and response to Mr Guest.

RESOLVED

That the information as now given, regarding costings for the Dudley Archives and Local History Service, be noted.

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on regeneration developments that had taken place in Coseley over the last decade; issues relating to the sustainability of the development potential of Coseley and its invigoration over the next decade and on the promotion of the importance of Coseley as a local centre of strategic relevance to the Council.

Arising from the presentation of the report by the Lead Officer members asked a number of questions and raised queries relating in particular to the scout hut and youth provision and in this connection an assurance was given that the need for youth provision to be on-going in the light of developments was recognised. Concerns were also raised over the type and range of housing to be provided and whether this would just lead to dormitory development. The need for additional car parking spaces at Coseley Railway Station was also raised.

It was also commented upon that the report did not consider leisure aspects as there was no reference to the Leisure Centre and the Archives Service, even though there were proposals to relocate that service, together with related comments that given proposals for housing development, discussed earlier in the meeting, there would be a greater need for leisure facilities in the area. The need for jobs to be provided in the Coseley area so that those seeking employment could do so on foot or carry out a short bicycle journey was also raised and the recognition that the further consideration of this report could lead to a greater recognition of Coseley as a local centre which was to be welcomed and was an indication of the effect the work of Select Committees and people from the area could have in making a difference.

In responding to points made the Lead Officer reported that he would write to Centro regarding the need to help find additional car parking spaces for rail users of Coseley Station.

In connection with the issue of leisure facilities in particular the Archives and Local History Service the Assistant Director, Libraries, Archives and Lifelong Learning reported that in addition to her previous comments she would further comment that there was an expectation that the service would work with partners and other organisations and to retain the site in Coseley would severely limit the partners that the Council could work with. The proposal to move to the Black Country Museum site would mean that the service was located near to the border with Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and would enable cross sector working with the Black Country Museum all of which would increase funding sources for the proposal. She also referred to Coseley Library in that in future it would be open for six days a week.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report, and reported at the meeting, on the regeneration developments that had taken place and the development potential for Coseley, be noted.
- (2) That the case for Coseley be made to the specific local centre Officer Group with the aim for its inclusion in the top regeneration local action centre priority list.

- (3) That a further report be submitted to a meeting of this Committee in approximately twelve months time on developments in Coseley and in respect of the six local centres identified in paragraph 5 of the report submitted.

68. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DIRECTORATE'S EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2008/09

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted on the annual equality and diversity action plan for 2008/09 for the Chief Executive's Directorate a copy of which was attached as an Appendix to the report submitted.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted on the Chief Executive's Directorate Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2008/09, be noted.

69. DIRECTORATE OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT'S EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN FOR 2008/09

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the Directorate of the Urban Environment's annual Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2008/09 a copy of which was attached as an Appendix to the report submitted.

Following presentation of the content of the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted Councillor Mottram queried the absence of Coseley Leisure Centre from those Leisure Centres referred to in Priority 2 in respect of compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act, 2005. It was noted that the relevant officer would respond to Councillor Mottram in respect of his query.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted on the Directorate of the Urban Environment's Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2008/09, be noted with any outstanding actions arising from the review of the Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2007/08 being incorporated into the 2008/09 Equality and Diversity Action Plan; and

- (2) That the Committee receive, in mid 2008 from the Directorate of the Urban Environment an Equality and Diversity Annual Report for 2007/08 detailing information on the implementation of the objectives outlined in the Action Plan.
-

70. PROGRESS REPORT ON REGENERATION OF STOURBRIDGE

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on progress to date in relation to the regeneration of Stourbridge.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted on the significant progress made in regenerating Stourbridge Town Centre, be noted.

71. PLANNING APPLICATION STATISTICS RELATING TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND APARTMENT DEVELOPMENTS

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on Planning Application Statistics relating to Affordable Housing and Apartment Developments.

Arising from the presentation of the report and comments made by the Principal Planning Policy Manager and by the General Manager Planning(John Pattinson), Members made a number of comments and queries and arising from these it was agreed that the Lead Officer to the Committee, in conjunction with Officers from Planning Policy ,submit a report to a future meeting of the Committee in respect of market potential for properties arising from comments made regarding unsold apartment blocks ; those resold within a short period of time and concerns raised over unoccupied blocks.

The Principal Planning Policy Manager was also requested to write to Councillor Tyler and the other members of the Committee in response to his query regarding the meaning of the words "Affordable units" referred to in paragraph 5 of the report submitted and how many of the units were flats.

Reference was also made that this would be the last meeting of the Committee at which John Pattinson would be present as he was shortly to take up a new appointment with another organisation. Tribute was paid to the work of John in relation to this and other Committees of the Council and the Chairman also thanked John, on behalf of the Committee, for all the work he had done.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted, on Planning Application Statistics relating to Affordable Housing and Apartment Developments for the period April 2006 to March 2007, be noted.
 - (2) That the Lead Officer to the Committee be requested to arrange for a report to be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee arising from the comments made regarding the market potential of flats/apartments in the Borough.
-

72. CORPORATE ICT STRATEGY 2008-2013

A report of the Director of Finance was submitted on the development of the Corporate ICT Strategy covering the period 2008 to 2013, a copy of which was attached as an Appendix to the report submitted.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted on the development of the Corporate ICT Strategy for the period 2008 to 2013, its subsequent publication and implementation, be noted.

73. UPDATE ON INSURANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS

A report of the Director of Finance was submitted on the results of the work that the Risk Manager had been asked to undertake arising from an earlier meeting of this Committee in respect of insurance arrangements for community groups.

During the consideration of this item the Officers concerned were thanked for the useful information contained in the report.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, on the results of the work that the Risk Manager had been asked to undertake arising from an earlier meeting of this Committee on insurance arrangements for community groups, be noted.

74. QUESTION UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 11.8

Under the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 11.8 Councillor Crumpton had submitted a question in four parts as follows:-

- (a) What is the Council's policy that lead up to the decision to have schools take over the administration of certain leisure centres;
- (b) What is the procedure and policy that was put in place for any on-going financial commitment from the Council towards the building costs; running costs or staff costs of the leisure centre;
- (c) What is the policy that has determined that the administration of the leisure centre falls outside the remit and responsibility of the Council; and
- (d) What is the policy that is in place for the position of the leisure centre if the school it is administered by is closed or is unable to discharge the responsibility of administration for whatever reason may occur.

The following response was given to the points raised:-

As a result of budget reductions that took place in the mid 1990s by this Council the dual funding arrangements in place to that date changed.

School Governors at those schools where dual school and wider public leisure facilities existed chose to take responsibility for the operation of the community use of the facilities.

Revenue subsidies from Leisure Services in the mid 1990s were cut back but the residual levels were passported to the school Governors. The work force at that time was made redundant though a number were re-engaged by the Governing bodies of the schools.

Following this transfer across to Governing Bodies of the four original dual use school and leisure facilities sites, a number of other schools have opened new sports facilities with community use. At these schools the Governors take full responsibility for the operational cost with no subsidy from the Leisure Service budget.

By definition the facilities now run by the Governors of these schools in line with national Government legislation run independent of the Council and have pursued their own policies and practices.

Until recently the four leisure facilities at the schools had to be managed on a breakeven basis as it was deemed unlawful to divert school budgets into non-educational purposes. More recent national provisions have allowed schools to fund a wider range of community provisions including leisure facilities.

As far as a leisure facility attached to a school set to close then the position is clear the leisure facility would close as well.

75.

COUNCILLORS JACKSON AND TOMKINSON

As this was the last scheduled meeting of the Committee in the current municipal year prior to the forthcoming local elections, reference was made that, following the local elections, Councillors Jackson and Tomkinson would no longer be members of the Council .In view of this tribute was paid to their work on this Committee and to their service to the Council as a whole.

The meeting ended at 9.15 p.m.

CHAIRMAN