

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

**Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny and Policy Development
Committee**

Meeting held 26 April 2017

PRESENT: Councillors Steve Wilson (Chair), Ian Auckland (Deputy Chair),
Lisa Banes, Neale Gibson, Dianne Hurst, Talib Hussain, Abdul Khayum,
Ben Miskell, Robert Murphy, Andy Nash, Chris Peace and Martin Smith

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Helen Mirfin-Boukouris.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 The Committee approved, as a correct record, the minutes of its last meeting held on 22nd February 2017.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 There were no petitions submitted or questions raised by members of the public.

6. ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE IN SHEFFIELD - EVIDENCE SESSION NO. 2

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Policy and Improvement Officer (Alice Nicholson) on the Economic Landscape in Sheffield - Evidence Session No. 2. The information reported as part of the Session, which comprised input from the City Council's Creative Sheffield and Planning Service, together with the information from Evidence Session No. 1, which had been held at the Committee's meeting held on 15th February 2017, and comprised comments from the Sheffield Chamber of Commerce and Industry, would be considered by the Task Group, established by the Committee, on the Economic Landscape in Sheffield.

6.2 In attendance for this item were Flo Churchill (Interim Chief Planning Officer) and Kevin Bennett (Head of Business Growth, Creative Sheffield), who had been asked to provide information in terms of their responses to the same three questions that Richard Wright (Executive

Director, Sheffield Chamber of Commerce and Industry) had responded to at the Committee's last meeting, as follows:-

1. Is Sheffield serving the needs of businesses/developers?
2. Are there any lessons for the future?
3. How do we compare with other cities or places?

6.3 Details of the responses from the Planning Service were set out in Appendix A to the report now submitted, and information from Creative Sheffield, together with a report produced by the University of Sheffield – 'State of Sheffield 2017', had been circulated to Members of the Committee prior to the meeting.

6.4 In addition to the information set out in the report, Flo Churchill reported that a new Head of Planning had been appointed, and was due to start on 9th May, 2017, and that the Place Portfolio had recently been restructured. There were likely to be a number of changes in terms of procedures and practices with regard to the Planning Service. As part of the restructuring proposals, a new City Growth Team had been created, which would comprise officers from Planning, Housing and Creative Sheffield, and help to improve the planning process, thereby enabling growth and development of the City. She stated that, whilst it was very difficult to measure whether Sheffield was serving the needs of businesses/developers, she stated that Sheffield was ambitious for growth, and the Planning Service was fundamental to enabling the delivery of such growth and development, as well as the transformation of the City as a place with the necessary infrastructure, community facilities and quality of environment to support it. Reference was made to the commencement of the Sheffield Retail Quarter development, as well as the recent decisions by Boeing and McLaren to open manufacturing plants in the region. The two Universities continued to develop and the Council continued to receive applications in terms of housing developments, with recent applications showing a swing from student accommodation to family housing. The Service offered a Pre-Application Service, where officers advised on matters relating to planning applications and which, in respect of large-scale applications, such as the Sheffield Retail Quarter, attracted significant income in terms of fees. There were plans to increase fees for planning applications in July 2017, by 20%, with any excess income being used to improve the overall service. The Service also offered a further paid for service, known as a Planning Performance Agreement, whereby developers entered into an agreement with the Service, and were guaranteed to receive a specific standard of performance in terms of the determination of their application. The Service would regularly liaise with the Local Enterprise Partnership and the Chamber of Commerce in connection with finding out what developers wanted when dealing with the Council. Ms Churchill stated that the Planning Service was very well respected across the country, having a good record of determining applications, and having very pro-active Enforcement, Development

Management and Urban Design Teams, who had won a number of prestigious awards.

6.5 In terms of comparisons with other cities or places, Ms Churchill referred to the report, which attached, as an appendix, benchmarking data in respect of the Core Cities. The data included budgetary information, information in terms of planning applications, and statistics regarding appeals, enforcement and building regulations.

6.6 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- The concerns regarding the levels of student accommodation, as opposed to family housing, were appreciated. There was a need to get a correct balance in terms of the different types of housing in the City.
- It was accepted that in those cases where individuals or companies had paid for pre-application advice, and that such advice, or reference to such advice, was not made public when the planning application was made, could be perceived as suspicious by the wider community. It was made clear to those applicants who chose to use this service that such advice was not binding on the Authority, and was provided with this caveat. It was accepted that there may be a need to publicly explain the terms and conditions of the Pre-Application Advice Scheme, and this was one of many issues currently being considered by the Service, particularly if it was found to be having an impact on the quality of decision-making. It was not known whether those local authorities which published details of their Pre-Application Advice Schemes had a more successful planning application process as there were questions as to how this success was measured. Around 90% of the determinations made were made by officers in the Planning Service, acting under delegated powers, with the remainder being determined by elected Members, based on officer advice, at meetings of the Planning and Highways Committee.
- It was very difficult to make comparisons with other local authorities in terms of the length of time it took to determine planning applications, particularly as such details were not published. Some of the more complex planning applications would always take longer to determine, for example, as part of the pre-application advice stage with regard to the Sheffield Retail Quarter, the length of time to determine this planning application was extended with the agreement of the developers. Officers had to make the best, most balanced determination based on the information provided as part of the application, with some applications taking longer than others to determine. The

Planning Service also received holding directions from the Highways Agency, which would result in some determinations taking longer than others. The Planning Service aimed to determine all planning applications received within the shortest possible timescale, and comments with regard to Sheffield taking longer than other local authorities to determine applications were strongly refuted. There was also the issue as to precisely when the determination commenced, as some applications were deemed invalid, which, in itself, could take time to determine.

- It was believed that the reports on planning applications, both where determinations were made by officers, under delegated powers, or by elected Members, contained balanced information, including any objections. The reports were also produced in line with planning guidance, legislation and local planning policy. Proper consideration was given to all objections to applications, and it was accepted that in many cases, the information in terms of objections was condensed, rather than make reference to every individual objection. The information would reference the issues raised, rather than set out information in respect of each individual objection, particularly when they referred to the same issue. Whilst the Service appreciates the importance of the nature of objections to planning applications, in some cases, the issues raised, such as the impact of a development on the price of a property, were not planning matters, and cannot be taken into consideration as part of the determination.
- There were a number of high quality public realm buildings in the City and, as part of its efforts to attract more buildings with a high quality design, the Service was planning to refresh the Urban Design Compendium. Officers were currently working on a number of projects involving buildings of high quality design, but as part of the process, consideration had to be given to the effects of such buildings on existing Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas in the City. As more developers expressed an interest in developing in the City, there would hopefully be an increase in the number of quality buildings. One of the outcomes of the recent restructuring of the Place Portfolio was to bring together those Services responsible for planning and the future growth of the City, and for taking the City forward, to establish a City Growth Team. The restructure was viewed as more of a cultural change, and one which would hopefully result in improved co-ordination and interaction.
- There had not been a meeting of the Development Forum for six months, on the basis of a reduction in the attendance at the last few meetings. Officers would look into why this had been the case, and whether organising such meetings would be productive in the future.

- The Service would always demand good quality developments on the basis that the City both deserved and needed this, and officers would instruct developers along those lines.
- Whether there would be a separate Planning Division as part of the Sheffield City Region would be dependent on the elected Mayor's powers. There was already a legal duty on the Authority to take a strategic lead in terms of dealing with applications for planning permission over the City boundary. Determining such applications invariably raised a number of issues.
- The reason behind the recent swing from student accommodation to family housing had been due to a rebalance in the housing market, mainly due to the student accommodation market reaching saturation and, to a lesser extent, the efforts made by the Council in terms of redressing the balance.
- An explanation of what the figures in the "Other" column in terms of the income with regard to the Core Cities' budgets for 2016/17 referred to would be circulated to Members of the Committee.
- Although there was no precise figure in terms of the number of housing developments that had been granted planning permission, but had not yet commenced, the Service held figures in terms of the number of housing developments completed and those cases where developments had received permission, but had not yet commenced. The Government was currently looking at amending the time limit granted in respect of the completion of developments. The Authority had the powers to enforce planning conditions, but did not have the power to force developers to do everything that they had been given permission to do, as part of their applications. Officers tried everything possible to ensure that developers completed all the works as detailed in their original planning applications. An example where developers had not completed all the works as detailed in their applications involved failure to construct stipulated levels of affordable housing, as part of major housing developments. Figures on the levels of housing approved, and completed, would be provided to Members.
- 175 of the 250 jobs created as part of the McLaren relocation comprised semi-skilled jobs, including apprenticeships and other semi-skilled manufacturing/operative jobs. It was believed that a similar pattern would be followed in connection with the relocation of other major companies, including Boeing. There was a need for the City Growth Team to talk to the City's schools and colleges in an effort to ensure that pupils had the necessary knowledge and skills, thereby creating a semi-skilled employee

base in the light of further, large manufacturing companies locating to the region.

- There was a view that the Council did not shout about some of the excellent work it undertook in terms of city growth. The Council had received a number of national and international awards in terms of planning and development, including Planning Excellence Awards and the Regional Urban Design Award.

6.7 Kevin Bennett stated that he had spent 18 months working with McLaren prior to their relocation to South Yorkshire, and indicated how impressed the Company was in terms of how the Council had dealt with them. In terms of future investment and City growth, Mr Bennett stated that the investment pipeline was currently the strongest it had been for a number of years, with around 78 projects currently being developed. The location of Boeing and McLaren to the region had been a major boost for the region's economy, and the Council was already dealing with a number of enquiries from other companies wanting to be located near the two companies, in terms of providing a supply chain. He stated that this, along with the increased number of planning applications, would help to generate substantial investment in the local economy in the next few years.

6.8 In response to a question from a member of the Committee, Mr Bennett stated that the Council worked closely with existing businesses and start-up businesses in the City, through its Business Sheffield branded service. This now encompassed a very strong start up service and support for businesses in their early years of development. It also included a very experienced team of Business Growth Advisers, who worked with existing companies in the City to help them achieve their growth ambitions.

6.9 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the additional information circulated prior to the meeting, and the responses provided to the questions raised;
- (b) requests that the explanation as to what the figures in the "Other" column in terms of the income regarding the Core Cities budgets for 2016/17 referred to, be circulated to Members as soon as possible; and
- (c) thanks Flo Churchill and Kevin Bennett for attending the meeting, and responding to the questions raised.

7. WORK PROGRAMME REVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17

7.1 The Policy and Improvement Officer (Alice Nicholson) submitted a

report containing a review of the Committee's Work Programme 2016/17 and attaching, as an appendix, a draft of the Scrutiny Annual Report 2016/17, containing details of highlights of the work of the Committee during this period.

7.2 Ms Nicholson made specific reference to the requirement for the Committee to consider the report and recommendations of the Western Road First World War Memorial Trees Task and Finish Cross Party Working Group at a meeting during the Municipal Year 2016/17. Councillor Lisa Banes, a member of the Working Group, indicated that whilst the majority of the Working Group's work had been completed, it had still not seen the report of the Independent Tree Panel or the Council's response to this report, therefore a special meeting would have to be arranged on a date when this information was available, thus leaving a very short timescale. Ms Nicholson stated that the most suitable date for the special meeting of the Committee was Tuesday, 16th May 2017, at 12.30 pm.

7.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the comments now made; and
- (b) agrees:-
 - (i) the date and time of the special meeting to consider the report and recommendations of the Western Road First World War Memorial Trees Task and Finish Cross Party Working Group as Tuesday, 16th May 2017, at 12.30 pm in the Town Hall; and
 - (ii) that the following topics be added to its Work Programme 2017/18:-
 - De-culverting of Rivers
 - Small Businesses
 - City Library Building/Sheffield Retail Quarter.

8. SHEFFIELD RETAIL QUARTER

8.1 The Director, Major Projects, submitted a report containing an update in terms of the Sheffield Retail Quarter following key decisions taken by the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet in 2014 and 2016.

8.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, particularly the significant progress that has been made in achieving a start in delivering the Retail Quarter, with the first phase now underway; and
- (b) requests the Retail Quarter Project Team to attend future meetings to

present the final plans and provide an update to Members on progress, financial outcomes and risk management with regard to the project.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 9.1 It was noted that, subject to any further changes in arrangements, a special meeting of the Committee would be held on Tuesday, 16th May 2017, at 12.30 pm, in the Town Hall.