

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 21st March, 2018
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

Present:-	Councillor Mark Olszewski – in the Chair
Councillors	Gardner, Huckfield, Matthews, Owen, Spence and Stubbs
Officers	Executive Director (Regeneration and Development) - Neale Clifton, Geoff Durham - Member Training and Development Officer and Kim Graham - Regeneration and Economic Development Manager
Apologies	Councillor(s) G Williams
Also in Attendance	Councillors Stubbs, Woolley and Wright (FRAPS) Mr Daniel Buckley – Newcastle-under-Lyme College Mrs Viv Bradford – Vice Chair of BID Board Mrs Gail Edwards – Staffordshire County Council

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Stubbs declared an interest as a former signatory of the District Deal.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 September, 2017 be agreed as a correct record.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Members were informed that the Draft Economic Development Strategy, referred to in item 5 of the Minutes had been approved at Cabinet earlier today following the necessary consultations. Members were thanked for their involvement in this project.

4. FUTURE USE OF LAND ASSOCIATED WITH THE RYECROFT DEVELOPMENT

Members received an update from the Executive Director for Regeneration and Development – Mr Neale Clifton.

He briefly explained the history to the scheme and referred to the ongoing structural changes within the retail sector which had impacted upon the emerging design and content of the scheme. In November 2017 the Council, as local planning authority, had resolved to approve a planning application for redevelopment of the Ryecroft site. It was noted that the approved scheme is more 'student accommodation-led' than 'retail-led'. It was envisaged that the student accommodation would generate substantial and demand for goods and services from businesses in the town centre which would benefit from this additional spending power.

There would be a block of four retail units of 10,000 square feet each on the former Sainsbury's site and a multi-storey building providing over 500 units of student

accommodation on the site of the current Civic Offices along with smaller retail/commercial units and a two hundred space car park.

It was confirmed that there is a land sale agreement between the Borough Council and HDD Ltd. The final disposal of the site hinged on a number of "Conditions Precedent"; essentially these are matters which the developer needs to be satisfied with before proceeding to implementation of the approved scheme.

Mr Clifton informed Members that there were three key issues – funding, retail lettings and issues relating to technical feasibility.

The Council and HDD had identified preferred "tier one retailers" who would be regarded as making a valuable contribution to the attractiveness of the town centre to shoppers. The marketing material had been updated following the decision on the planning application and HDD's retail agents were promoting the scheme to prospective retailers although it was acknowledged that market conditions both locally and nationally were somewhat challenging.

It was anticipated that the move to Castle House from the Civic Offices would take place around mid-June, 2018 – being open to the public by 25 June. The Civic Offices would then have to be decommissioned in respect of gas, electricity and water and the site made secure thereby providing vacant possession for HDD.

Members queried whether two hundred car parking spaces – proposed with the new development – would be sufficient given that there will be over five hundred student flats.

Mr Clifton advised Members that as part of Keele University's policies for managing its campus, students living off-campus would not be given permits to park and it should be cost-prohibitive for them to park on the campus. The aim of this being to discourage students using private motor cars and encouraging them to use buses, cycle or walk.

Resolved: That the information be received and the comments noted.

5. EXAMINATION OF TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT

Mrs Viv Bradford, a Business Improvement District (BID) Board Member updated Members on the progress of the BID's work in trying to improve the economic vitality of the town centre economy.

A BID booklet was handed out at the meeting entitled 'Newcastle-under-Lyme Highlights and Achievements 2017'. The booklet focussed on three main objectives: Promotion; Experience; and Growth, Development and Investment.

By making the visit to the town a pleasant experience it would encourage more people to visit. There was also the objective of encouraging the take up of empty shop units.

An update was given on the activities of the BID which included training events, networking events, encouraging circus-themed window displays within the town centre and festivals (including the Lymelight and Jazz and Blues).

Members were advised that the vacancy rate of shop units had risen from 9.51 % to 13.8% in December and this figure would increase further.

The Council's Regeneration and Economic Development Manager – Ms Kim Graham circulated information on a Vacancy Rate Survey with comparisons across the country. In terms of the West Midlands, Biddulph was highest with a rate of 18.18% and Kenilworth the lowest with 4.58%.

Nationally, there was an issue with the retail sector in traditional High Streets. The larger shopping complexes did better due to having everything 'under one roof'. There was also the issue of online shopping and changes in shopping habits which were having a significant impact.

The Council wants to promote a sustainable town centre so there was a need to decide how this could be done. The BID and the Council need to work with other partners to find a way forward that suits the unique conditions and opportunities presented by our town centre.

Councillor Stubbs asked what key areas were applicable to Newcastle over the next few years.

Mrs Bradford stated that the demographics of the local population would change as would the use of the town centre. For example, with the increase of the student population, parents from outside of the area would visit creating a need for more hotel accommodation and coffee shops / eateries.

Members were advised that the Roebuck Centre had been taken over and the owners were encountering difficulty in trying to fill the empty units within the complex as people were waiting to see what units may be available in the Ryecroft development.

Members commented on the rateable values of some of the shop units and suggested that smaller units may be a way forward. The BID were currently looking into this.

A suggestion was made to talk to students to find out their preferences of the kinds of 'businesses' they would want to see within the town and also, the shopping habits of the young, middle aged and elderly could be investigated.

It was noted that Members of the Finance, Resources and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee wished to raise the issue of CCTV monitoring within the town.

Officers commented that as part of the BID's establishment a baseline position was established in respect of a whole range of services (including CCTV provision and monitoring) in order that the BID could demonstrate "additionality" or enhancements to existing services. It was noted that there was a caveat relating to budgetary constraints so the Council could reduce or cease provision of CCTV services. Therefore the BID and the Council could review the scope for a phased contribution for the next two financial years rather than risk complete cessation of this service which is valued by the businesses, particularly the small independents.

Mrs Bradford confirmed that the BID were going to look into CCTV.

Resolved: That the information be received and the comments noted.

6. **DISTRICT DEAL**

Members received an update from Mrs Gail Edwards from Staffordshire County Council on the past District Deal arrangements between the County and Borough Councils. A copy of the District Deal 2 letter was circulated to Members at the meeting to assist Members in their understanding of the content and form of the 'deals'.

Items in the two previous District Deals included the Ryecroft and Castle House developments which were both moving forward. In fact there was notable progress on many of the items. However it was felt that some elements of the Deal letters had not been prioritised and there was a lack of formality in the governance arrangements.

Mrs Edwards confirmed that the successor arrangements to the District Deal letters would be more strategic in nature, embedded in a vision for the area's growth and focus on a smaller number of significant priorities. These priorities would be linked to the emerging Local Plan and to the Economic Development Strategy.

Councillor Huckfield commented on the amount of industrial land within the Borough and suggested that houses needed to be built where there were jobs. Industrial land should not be used to build houses on.

Mr Clifton stated that there was additional land at the Keele University Science Park (Phase 3) which could be extended further, subject to the emerging Local Plan. There was also land at Chatterley Valley/Chatterley sidings and a few other sites.

Councillor Huckfield said that there needed to be an emphasis on job creation and Mrs Edwards stated that the emerging "Growth Strategy" would be about that and would link the issue of jobs to the Local Plan.

Councillor Stubbs felt that some of the themes in the letter were being down-played. Gail Edwards stated that there would be a smaller number of projects that could be delivered.

Councillor Gardner suggested that a list of the types of businesses we want was required and that a strong and concerted focus was required.

Councillor Own felt that, with the increases in housing and industrial developments and the increase in the amount of traffic, the highways situation needed to be looked at. Connectivity would be looked at with infrastructure and transport. Mr Clifton advised that an Infrastructure Delivery Plan would run in conjunction with the Local Plan. In addition he said that current levels of congestion were relatively modest according to the Highway Authority's traffic modelling.

Resolved: That the information be received and the comments noted.

7. ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE OF THE BOROUGH

Ms Graham updated Members on the Economic Performance of the Borough. She circulated copies of statistical information which had been sourced from NOMIS. A link to this would be forwarded to Members for their future use.

Overall the data indicated that Newcastle Borough, when compared to the West Midlands and UK averages, was not doing too badly. Nevertheless there were some

particular threads of information which indicated areas of concern, pointing towards the Council and its partners needing to adopt different strategies to tackle issues.

From an employment point of view Newcastle was classed as being fully employed. Out of Work benefits for Newcastle was at 1.5% compared to 2.6% in the West Midlands and Great Britain 2.1%. However we have a significant number of individuals in receipt of Employment Support Allowance and Ms Graham referred to future initiatives which would attempt to get some of those people back into work.

Another statistic that drew Members' attention was the average gross weekly pay in Newcastle was £474.70 which was lower than the West Midlands and Great Britain. Councillor Gardner commented that the figures also showed a large gender pay gap which needed to be addressed.

Resolved: That the information be received and the comments noted.

8. **WORK PLAN**

Future items on the work plan would be considered by the Group in the new Municipal Year.

9. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions from the public.

10. **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Business.

COUNCILLOR MARK OLSZEWSKI
Chair

Meeting concluded at 8.58 pm