

ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT & PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 17th June, 2021
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Helena Maxfield (Chair)

Councillors:	David Grocott	John Tagg	Paul Waring
	Mark Olszewski	Marion Reddish	
	Andrew Fear	Andrew Parker	

Officers:	Simon McEneny	Executive Director - Commercial Development & Economic Growth
	Geoff Durham	Mayor's Secretary / Member Support Officer
	Richard Landon	IT Support Officer
	Roger Tait	Head of Operations

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors' Jenny Cooper, Barry Panter and Gary White.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest stated.

3. MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 March, 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

4. UPDATE FROM CABINET

There was no update from Cabinet.

5. PROGRESS REPORT ON TREE MANAGEMENT

The Council's Head of Operations, Roger Tait introduced a report on tree management. The report set out the Council's approach to tree management and progress had been made in that there was now a tree team operating all year round. A cherry picker had been purchased to safely access branches. The Council had an aging workforce so tree climbing was an issue. The Council had continued to let an annual contract for the more complex work each year and more progress had been made with the digital Tree Management System (TMS) up to date.

The Council's approach to tree management was risk based with high priority work being done first to keep the community safe and to protect the Council's liability. There was a backlog of work which was low risk works. It was understandable that

residents were disappointed when the low risk works took longer to be programmed but in terms of the resources that the Council had, it had to be managed that way.

To help with the low risk work, a protocol had been adopted where residents, if they wished, could offer to pay to bring work up the programme which could then be accessed via the Council's contractor.

A request had been made by the Chair, Councillor Gary White to enable Parish Councils to bring tree works forward within their parishes. A protocol for this was appended to the report.

Councillor Olszewski stated that some matters of tree works had been taking around four years from being reported to being completed. In addition, in Wolstanton – the trees around the Marsh, very often are overhanging the pavement. There had been cases where partially sighted residents had had overhanging branches in their faces. Whilst it was a much slimmed down service, it was fair to say that despite the extra contract work it was still a service that was inadequate for the residents. It was not a failing service because the service that was provided was a good one but just not enough of it. The service did not meet the demands and in some cases could be quite hazardous.

Roger Tait agreed that there was a lot more that could be done if there was the resource to do it. Members were advised that if they had particular issues within their wards that were not being addressed adequately, to get in touch and they would be looked into. In addition, the TMS system could be looked at to see where some of the outstanding jobs were sitting at the moment.

Councillor Reddish asked what the anticipated take up would be for residents to fund the work and for Parish Councils.

Roger Tait stated that, in terms of Parish Councils there were some very proactive ones within the Borough. The Council was currently working with Madeley Parish Council who were on the verge of appointing a tree contractor to carry out works around Madeley Pool and Audley Parish Council were also proactive in their tree work. In terms of residents, the take up was not particularly high at present but it was an option.

Councillor Reddish stated that it was better for areas that had a Parish Council but for those areas without one did that make them disadvantaged because the Council had not got the resources. Did the areas without Parish Councils come back to the Council.

Roger Tait confirmed that this was the case. Using the risk based approach, anything that was high risk to people or property in a non-parish ward would be on the Council's high priority list and would be taken care of. The works that were not happening was the low risk/low priority ones.

Councillor Paul Waring asked what was meant by low value items, for example a couple of hundred pounds or a thousand.

Roger Tait advised that the term low value referred to works that were not essential to the tree and not posing a risk to people or property. A lot of the time it was general, shading out of people's gardens so in monetary terms that too would be low value.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the report be received and that the current approach to tree management and associated risks, be acknowledged.
 - (ii) That the proposed mechanism to enable Parish Councils and other organisations to implement and fund tree work which is considered to be a local priority, be endorsed.

6. FUTURE HIGH STREETS FUND UPDATE

The Council's Executive Director - Commercial Development and Economic Growth, Simon McEneny gave a presentation which covered the next two items on the agenda.

The presentation covered the Future High Street Advanced Town Deal and Town Deal Funding. Photographs were presented which showed what works had been carried out using the £1.75m government funding for Newcastle and £750,000 for Kidsgrove which had to be spent by the end of March, 2021.

The photographs included new gates at Clough Hall Park, the Pump Track at Newchapel which was opening tomorrow, a new 3G pitch at the King's Academy and Kidsgrove Sports Hall. Photographs for the Newcastle area included the Knutton Community Centre demolition, Primary Care Trust building demolition, A34 central reservation repair, lighting to the stalls in the Ironmarket and transformation of the subways. The former jewellers in Lancaster Buildings had been acquired and refurbished to become a drop in skills hub.

The Future High Street funding was awarded at the start of spring 2021 and the Council now had authority to start demolition works at the former Civic Offices building in Merrial Street. The contract should be awarded in July this year and works commencing in August through to September/October 2022, paving the way for the redevelopment. Work would also commence on the new car park that would replace the Midway which would be done as part of the Town Deal Funding as it was not possible to fund this through the Future High Streets Fund.

The Council wanted to try and acquire the York Place building to open up the town centre so that it could be seen from the road with the creation of plaza's.

The Kidsgrove Town Deal had been validated by the Government and the Council had received the first funding award for the sports centre. The second priority work was at Chatterley Valley for infrastructure works totalling £3.5m. Work would be carried out at the site entrance to would reduce and release the viability issue to release the site for approximately two thousand jobs, aiming to create an advanced ceramics campus. Kidsgrove Railway Station would also be upgraded with a new station and car park and mixed use development in the space in front of the station by the crossroads making the station more visible and accessible.

The Newcastle Town Deal of £23.6m was awarded last week. A total of £1.8m needed to be sliced off the original project that had been put forward. A priority of schemes would now be agreed and a decision made on which business cases to put forward.

The Chair thanked Simon McEneny and said that it was really positive news and real builds were starting to happen.

Councillor Olszewski asked about the Newcastle Town Deal Funding, whether it was ring-fenced for the town centre or was some designated for some of the village centres, in particular, Wolstanton.

Simon McEneny stated that both of the Town Deals had a 'red line' around them which was decided by the Town Deal Boards. For example the Newcastle red line goes up to Chatterley Valley. There would be some work as part of the Newcastle Town Deal for areas such as Knutton and Chesterton but at present, nothing was included for Wolstanton.

Councillor Olszewski asked if there was a reason for this.

Simon McEneny advised that a process was undertaken where there was a call for sites/projects which were then assessed, reviewed and accepted by the Board. He did not think that anything had been received from Wolstanton.

Councillor Olszewski did not think that there had been any consultation or ask of what local ward Councillors would like or that there was an opportunity to bid in Wolstanton.

Simon McEneny would check but he was almost certain that every Ward Councillor in the affected areas were advised of the Town Deal possibilities. The Council had tried to capture as many consultees as possible in that process and apologised if some Members had been missed.

Councillor Fear stated that it was nice to receive that some of money. He commented that two areas of Newcastle town centre had been identified as being problematic – York Place and the Roebuck Centre. If York Place could be acquired that would be a good thing and the question was asked, how good were the possibilities to do this? Half of the premises were occupied by viable units so would they be offered relocation. Also, could York Place be made much more consonant with the Ironmarket and town centre which had red brick buildings. Referring to the Roebuck Centre, Councillor Fear stated that there were very few viable units in there and thought that nobody would want to lose the frontage which had a historic value but what could be done with what was behind it to boost it up.

Simon McEneny stated that the Council was attempting to purchase York Place by direct negotiation with the owner. If it was acquired the viable businesses could have their tenancies ended for redevelopment and relocated. There were only about 7 or 8 tenants in the entire building so approximately 30% full. Upon inspection of the maintenance records, there was approximately £2-3m worth of repairs that needed to be done to bring it up to date.

The Council was in contact with the owner of the Roebuck Centre. There was just the one tenant in there now – Iceland. The frontage units forming part of the Roebuck had been sold off so the Centre was now the entrance and the space behind. There was no proposal to demolish or alter the outside of the Roebuck but part of the Town Deal for Newcastle was the establishment of the Circus school and performing arts centre. One of the aspirations and needs for that facility was space both horizontally and vertically, which the Roebuck had in the middle, so it would make a good space for that type of activity.

Councillor Fear suggested that the façade was most probably listed as a historic hotel.

The Council was aiming to bring different uses into the town centre through the use of these funds.

Members requested a copy of the presentation which would be sent to them.

7. TOWN INVESTMENT PLANS FOR KIDSGROVE AND NEWCASTLE UNDER LYME

This was covered under the previous agenda item.

8. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair asked Members to email any ideas for Scrutiny to herself or to Councillor Gary White which would then be incorporated into the Work Programme.

9. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

10. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

CLLR HELENA MAXFIELD
Chair

Meeting concluded at 7.40 pm