

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday, 8th September, 2020

Present:- Councillor Mallinder (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Buckley, B. Cutts, Elliot, Jepson, Jones, Lelliott, McNeely, Reeder, Rushforth, Sansome, Sheppard, Taylor, Tweed, Whysall and Wyatt. Co-optees M. Jacques and K. Bacon were also present.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hoddinott, the Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-
<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

85. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 14 JULY 2020

Resolved:-

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 July 2020, be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

86. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

87. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

The Chair advised that there were no members of the public or representatives of media organisations present at the meeting and there were no questions in respect of matters on the agenda.

88. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair advised that there were no items of business on the agenda that would require the exclusion of the press or public from the meeting.

89. COMMUNICATIONS

The Chair confirmed there were no communications.

90. TOWN CENTRE MASTER PLAN UPDATE

Consideration was given to an update report presenting recent progress toward the goals set out in the Town Centre Masterplan which were adopted by Cabinet in September 2017. The report described the progress with respect to a number of interventions that had been identified as key projects, including a leisure led Forge Island redevelopment; high-quality public realm, in key locations in the town centre, and improved linkages between Forge Island and the town centre

core to fully realise the benefits of the Forge Island development; redevelopment of Rotherham Markets; and development of housing sites within the town centre.

A range of additional projects were also described including University Centre Rotherham's new £10.5m town centre campus, offering degrees and professional training qualifications in a state of-the-art teaching facility; a National Tram Train Pilot, a unique national pilot scheme that connects heavy and light rail infrastructure, systems and operations together to provide a new transport service between Sheffield and Rotherham; a Rotherham Interchange Refurbishment, a £12m refurbishment and modernisation of the Rotherham Interchange enhancing the public transport infrastructure present in the town centre; George Wright, a major renovation of Grade II Listed building as a boutique hotel with associated bar and restaurant; Westgate Chambers and Domine Lane, a £10.7m redevelopment in a prime central location providing, retail space and 61 apartments; at Keppel Wharf, Old Market and Imperial Buildings, work was underway to increase the residential space at Keppel Wharf overlooking the river and incentives offered to attract new niche businesses to vacant refurbished retail spaces in the Grade II Listed Imperial Buildings; and Makers Emporium, a unique retail space on the High Street bringing together a mixture of crafters, makers, artists and designers, trading from a shared and professionally managed retail unit. (In the 6 years since opening, over 120 small businesses have been supported by Makers Emporium).

The report included information regarding the funding for these projects which originated from various sources including Sheffield City Region, the Get Building Fund, and the Council's own funding contribution to the development delivery. Details were included as to which projects were funded by which schemes and which would be included as part of the next bidding stages, such as potential funding that is being requested from the Future High Street Fund and other Town Deal Fund Grants.

A progress update was provided as to the delivery of the projects including the flood defences and housing projects, and indicative timescales for future delivery were also provided. Details as to preliminary concept design for leisure developments were also displayed as part of the presentation.

In discussion, Members requested assurances that there would be provision for sufficient litter bins, recycling bins, and wardens to keep the areas clean and tidy. Assurances were provided in response that such measures would be taken to keep the areas tidy, even though the full range of details would not be visible at this stage in the design, they would be included at a later stage.

Members also asked for assurances that accessibility had been taken into consideration in the design of these spaces; it was further inquired as to how many accessible parking spaces would be made available. The

answer provided assurances that the housing developments had been designed to be visited accessibly, although not designed expressly for accessibility for disabled residents to live in. With regard to the accessible parking, the answer was offered in writing.

Assurances were requested as to back up plans in case bids for funding proved unsuccessful. There were three main categories: council funded, funding in place, private sector funding, and finally the bids that are in. If partial funding is received, the hunt for other funding or other investment from ourselves or others will then commence. Otherwise, it would be necessary to revise the propositions. The devolution funding had been approved, so there was more funding from SCR that could be leveraged in due course.

Assurances were also requested as to how the planning would be flexible in the face of unforeseen circumstances and changing national picture when it came to planning consultation. Officers responded that consultation had revealed COVID had put pressure on retail space but a benefit of this Masterplan was that it combined leisure, retail and housing, and it could be expected that other town centres around the country will follow suit.

Members requested assurances around provision for car parking at Forge Island. The response provided the information that a public car park had been planned to have 350 spaces. Those who parked in order to visit the Cinema would be refunded so that their parking was free. The Council would set the parking fees. During the day, the car park would be used as a general Town Centre parking facility.

Members requested clarification as to the future of a specific site on Corporation Street. Planning permission had been granted to the burned buildings on this street, with a 12-month window to demolish the buildings. The three-month extension had been allowed due to COVID. The plans were to build hotels on those sites, but as long as a valid planning permission existed for those sites, it was in the hands of the developers and the owners of the buildings to demolish the buildings. Until the allowed time has elapsed, no further action could be taken.

Members inquired if funding was being sought for revitalisation of other townships within the Borough in addition to the Town Centre. In response, it was clarified that the area of the Town Centre was set by Central Government, and that the revitalisation plan for the Town Centre was decided on as a priority set by Members. Officers were therefore seeing that priority through to implementation. At the moment, other plans for similar priorities in other townships were not in place. Other funding could be sought, should that stance be taken. With respect to the other townships in question, in terms of economic development, a few years ago, the council invested in a business incubation centre which had been established in Dinnington in addition to other similar centres elsewhere in the Borough, for example in Wath and near Magna.

Members raised concerned that buildings would be of good quality and consistently maintained so as to remain neat in appearance. In response, members referenced the Lifetime Homes standards that some developers were required to work to. The standard that was currently being built to was not perhaps as rigorous as the Lifetime Homes standards, from an accessibility standpoint, but the building plans that were in use would be nonetheless manoeuvrable for wheelchair use. Homes England which were the partner organisation for the affordable housing developments (shared ownership and council rent) have their own space standards that they have to work to, a generous space standard. These were not rabbit hutches or compromised space standards that some renovated or repurposed spaces had often exhibited. Assurances were provided that quality standards that have not been upheld by houses in some of the 2011 builds in Canklow were currently under review by officers with a view to addressing any structural or aesthetic issues.

Members also requested assurances around selection of consistent pavement surfaces such that partially and non-sighted community members would also be able to navigate these areas safely. Assurance was provided that although the exact materials had not yet been chosen, there would be consistency in the theme and in the design so that it would be clear how to navigate the space and people would be able to tell easily where they want to go.

Resolved:-

1. That the update report be noted.

91. BEREAVEMENT SERVICES UPDATE

Consideration was given to an update report with respect to Bereavement Services, specifically the performance delivery by partner organisation Dignity Funerals, Ltd. This report followed from the previous discussion which had taken place at the December 2019 meeting. The report included an update on the permanent extension of latest burial time at East Herringthorpe Cemetery, following a successful pilot. The report also included the active plans to reschedule a member visit to the cemetery which had been cancelled due to coronavirus. The report addressed 54 key performance targets, providing an update on performance against each of the measures. Two performance targets had not been met at the time of the annual report: provision of environmentally friendly burials and secure storage for registers and records.

In discussion, Members inquired as to the latest status of secure storage arrangements. The representative from Dignity provided assurance that as of the current day all records had been placed permanently into secure

storage, and appointments could be made to view these records.

Members also requested more information about how chapel repairs were handled. Officer indicated that an initial meeting had been scheduled for the 28 September with officers in Bereavement Services and Asset Management to address the four sites in Rotherham that have disused chapels. Meetings with Friends of the Cemetery groups have located possible funding that these organisations could be eligible to apply for. Good practice has also been considered. It was requested that the outcome of these meetings be circulated to ward members.

Members sought clarification around capacity, as capacity had been measured in 'years' and such metrics may be no longer appropriate if rates of need had grown during coronavirus. Officers provided assurances that sites had been identified by the working group. Currently legal personnel were examining the areas, and testing for possible expansion was underway. Results were awaited to add on to the burial sites, which if possible, would allow for many more years of burials at Wath, including environmentally friendly burials. Asset management had also visited a Maltby site. Some sites had been declared not suitable as originally hoped, but a potentially better site had been identified.

Members also requested more information around the reasons that arrangements had not yet been made to be able to provide environmentally friendly burials. The representative from Dignity supplied information that the first draft on the consultation had been completed and shared with Bereavement Services that same day. Further details of the timeline for arrangements were provided, extending through the autumn. Three potential sites had been identified and visited.

Further, a question was raised around availability of refrigerated coffin space during the pandemic. Assurances were provided that daily monitoring processes were put into place during the pandemic, one of which was monitoring the availability of storage whether it was at the mortuary or at the funeral director's. There was additional temporary storage put in place at the Rotherham hospital, which is still in place. Any issues that surface are noted quickly, therefore the service was confident that it was prepared to respond to any increase in deaths, even given seasonal fluctuations and the pandemic situation.

Members also sought clarification around the topic of DIY curb sets, given the health and safety concerns. It was clarified that the DIY curb sets were those placed by families, and these were often not compliant with health and safety regulations. These presented challenges to maintenance as well. The presence of any DIY curb sets was planned to be addressed concurrently with the upcoming safety testing and assessment of the memorials.

Members thanked the representative of Dignity for their work in completing so many of the numerous objectives. A follow up with the

member was offered after the meeting regarding the collaborations with “Friends of” societies.

Members noted the advantages of working with “Friends of” Societies and looking at best practices for addressing disused Chapels. It was hoped that future discussions could include a consideration of alternative funding methods of churchyard and burial area maintenance, since conventional avenues for these groups to source funding had been compromised by the pandemic. In response, further input from Members was welcomed as the meetings with Friends of groups were being undertaken with a view to making these meetings as helpful as possible. Through the neighbourhoods team, the service had maintained an ongoing conversation with Parish Councils. Upcoming meeting times were clarified for Members as well.

Resolved:-

1. That the briefing be noted.
2. That the annual performance report be noted.
3. That the permanent extension of latest burial time at East Herringthorpe Cemetery be noted.
4. That progress in respect of digitisation of burial records be submitted in the next update.
5. That the next update be provided in 12 months, to include information on land use.

92. OUTCOMES FROM SCRUTINY WORKSHOP - HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE (AUGUST 27 2020)

Consideration was given to a summary of the recent virtual workshop on Housing repairs and maintenance which was held on 27 August 2020. The workshop addressed the topics such as the new contract with Engie, COVID-19 response, Communications with and feedback from Residents, Operations Priorities, and Social Value Added.

Resolved:-

1. That the briefing be noted.
2. That the results of data analysis including GIS mapping be included in the next update in respect of Housing Repairs and Maintenance.

3. That the Chair, together with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, arrange a meeting with relevant Senior Leadership in respect of concerns around call centre wait times and dropped call rates.

93. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Governance Advisor provided an update with respect to progress on the agreed Work Programme including two changes to the scheduling of work programme items. It was advised that the PSPO on Dog Fouling had stayed with the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, but relevant papers would be circulated to Members so that they would be able to stay current on the development of that discussion. Further, it was noted that Highways have been moved later in the year, to February, in order to allow for more completed progress on projects to be reported.

In discussion, Members requested more information about possible revised scheduling for the Energy Switching Scheme item. In response, the Strategic Director of Regeneration and Finance noted that the Energy Switching Scheme was in the process of being reworked and would likely also be rescheduled.

Resolved:-

1. That the updated Work Programme be approved.

94. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that there were no urgent items of business requiring the Commission's consideration.

95. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Chair announced that the next virtual meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission will take place on 22 October 2020, commencing at 1:30 pm.