

**IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
20th September, 2018**

Present:- Councillor Mallinder (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Fenwick-Green, Jepson, Jones, McNeely, Sansome, Sheppard, Julie Turner, Vjestica, Walsh, Whysall and Wyatt, along with Mrs. W. Birch and Mrs. L. Shears (Co-optees).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Buckley, B. Cutts, Elliot and Khan.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-

<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Sansome declared a personal interest in Minute No. 20 (Thriving Neighbourhoods) on the basis that he was involved in a Neighbourhood Working Group Forum. He would remain in the room, but not participate in the debate.

Councillor Sheppard declared a personal interest in Minute No. 20 (Thriving Neighbourhoods) on the basis that he was involved in a Neighbourhood Working Group Forum. He would remain in the room, but not participate in the debate.

16. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from members of the public or the press.

17. COMMUNICATIONS

The Chair reminded the Commission about the visit to the Crematorium tomorrow at 10.30 a.m. (21st September) following the recent renovations.

The Chair also sought the Commission's agreement to the co-option of Mrs. W. Birch from Rotherfed to take the place of the previous co-optee who retired.

Resolved:- That Mrs. Birch be included on the membership of the Improving Places Select Commission as a co-optee from Rotherfed.

18. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 26 JULY 2018

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26th July, 2018.

Reference was made to Minute No. 11 (Dignity Contract) and the positive feedback which would feed into the action plan and performance monitoring process. Further update reports would be provided to the Improving Places Select Commission in due course.

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission held on Thursday, 26th July, 2018, be approved as a correct record.

19. ROTHER VALLEY CARAVAN PARK

Consideration was given to the report presented by Phil Gill, Green Spaces Manager, which provided current details on the construction of the new camping and caravan site at Rother Valley Country Park. The development was on track and scheduled for completion and handover in March, 2019, in line with the original project programme. This was an ambitious programme, but would be in operation from Easter, 2019.

Further information was provided on the capital costs of the programme, approval of planning permission in April, 2018 and tenders and the interest and consultation which helped shape the proposals.

The project was being carefully managed and there were odd issues cropping up which were being managed within budget.

Operation and marketing of the site moving forward was being developed, alongside the secure booking system which would be simple to use deliver best possible income. This would be subject to further evaluation and review.

Additionally, a short presentation, using PowerPoint, was provided for the Select Commission and highlighted:-

- Consultation – Elected Members and examples of comments.
- Consultation – Youth Cabinet and examples of comments.
- Consultation – Access4All and examples of comments.
- Consultation - Caravan Users and examples of comments.
- Consultation - Local Residents and examples of comments.
- Recent Progress in photo format – 5th September, 2018.

A discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised and clarified:-

- Site access, disabled pitches, controlled use of showers/toilets and the possibility of caravan storage facilities.

These issues were all being addressed with disabled pitches for reservation nearer the reception and access controls to the toilet blocks. Whilst there was no independent storage space for caravans planned in the longer term consideration will be given to identifying a piece of land specifically for caravan storage to maximise business opportunities.

- Completion of groundworks and any potential risk to the project not being completed on time.

All the building work and surfaces were complete. There were no areas of concern in relation to groundworks. Work was still ongoing to roadworks to bring them up to level to get surfaced and pitches were now having topsoil, being levelled and planted.

- Page 12 of the report referred to a proposed revised scheme being submitted to Planning Board for a variation to contract and it was not clear if this had been approved.

The planning application to vary the condition had been submitted, but had not yet been considered. There were no concerns outside the main contract works.

- Procurement of the online booking system to go live before end of 2018. Could the Commission have an update on progress at its February, 2019 meeting.

An update on the booking system would be provided in February. It had taken some time to obtain the approvals needed and an order had now been placed to tailor to specific needs.

- Business opportunity for caravan owners to store caravans and then have them placed onto a pitch.

This was a helpful suggestion on a storage service and would be considered in due course.

- Seasonal pitch consideration which may alleviate some concerns for traffic at arrival/departure times.

The provision of seasonal pitches was under review, but some evaluation of demand was required, before branching into other areas. Departure and arrival times were also being closely looked at to minimise disruption on the road network, for visitors to the park and to enable necessary maintenance around pitches.

- Monitoring of shower blocks to prevent accidents and to avoid children using them as playgrounds.

It was important to maintain shower blocks to prevent abuse and any potential risks. These areas would be closely monitored by site staff.

- Had consideration been given to contracts for energy and utilities in order to contribute to the savings targets.

Further information was to be sought regarding energy and utility contracts.

- Business opportunities for storage and relocation of caravans for owners could be considered, in addition to whether or not local scout groups could use the area out of season and if discounts may be applicable.

The service remained open and enthusiastic about discounts and special deals for local groups, but would still have to be mindful how this may impact on other users.

- Operational signage plan for the whole site and whether this would specific planning permission.

Liaison was taking place with colleagues in Transportation around signage and more specifically the brown signs which were strictly controlled. These could not be provided too far from the site, but initially would be placed at the junction at Wales Bar. The site was very large and would require internal signage. Colleagues were considering how best this could be achieved.

- Were there any further plans for static caravans, any indoor entertainment and charging points for electric vehicles.

The planning permission did not allow for static caravans nor did it fit with the business model and it was aimed specifically at touring caravans, motorhomes and tents. An indoor activity would be provided within the main block and have space for a café bar, television, separate games room and some recreation.

In the longer term development of the caravan site would be explored further.

Discussion had taken place with regards to electric vehicles with some provision installed in 2019. Further information would be shared in due course.

- What were the plans for recycling within the park and were there any plans to dovetail waste plans with those across the Borough.

There were plans for special bins to be designed for the separation of waste. This would be subject to monitoring by staff and signposting information accordingly to users.

- Contingency plans following handover and the official opening for Easter, 2019.

The caravan site's completion date was 4th March, 2019 and it was hoped to then operate on a trial basis. Progress would be closely monitored should it be found bookings could not be honoured. Information already shared via social media showed that the service had already received a huge amount of interest.

- Could the Select Commission visit the site for a pre-completion check.

Details regarding a visit would be shared in due course and the appropriate arrangements made.

Resolved:- (1) That the construction of a new camping and caravan site at Rother Valley Country Park, which was on track and scheduled for completion and handover in March, 2019, in line with the original project programme, be noted.

(2) That a report be submitted early in 2019 looking at the procurement on the online booking system and progress once it was live.

(3) That an update report on progress be submitted to the Improving Places Select Commission six months after the official opening and to feedback on the impact on local residents.

20. THRIVING NEIGHBOURHOODS

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Deputy Leader and Assistant Chief Executive which detailed the production of a new Neighbourhood Strategy, which would see the Wards as the building blocks that enabled partners and communities to work together to improve local outcomes.

The Strategy's aim was for the Council and residents to work together to achieve better quality of life and described the key role for Elected Members, both as champions of place and as community leaders, bringing together those who cared about the local neighbourhood. The Strategy also described how the Council would take a strength based approach drawing on existing strengths in the community and valuing the role of voluntary and community groups and assets.

The Head of Performance, Intelligence and Improvement had led on the development of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and had spoken to a whole range of stakeholders. This good piece of work had identified examples of neighbourhood activity and one of the challenges being faced was consistency rather than pockets of good activity and good practices.

The restructure of Neighbourhood Services had been lengthy, but with the support of the Trades Unions was moving forwards and the outstanding vacancies being filled. During the transitional period there had also been a review of the Neighbourhood Service to align it with the new model. A new Head of Neighbourhoods joined the Council earlier this month.

Further comments on the Strategy were welcomed as it was still draft prior to receiving formal approval by Cabinet in November, 2018.

As part of the implementation, staff were in place to work across the Council in the delivery of services. The importance of working together with Members was recognised to take the civic leadership model forward.

A discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised and clarified:-

- Page 24 of the report referred to the governance and key priorities and CCTV deployment.

CCTV would be used as part of the Strategy and where this was not working it would be resolved.

- Page 25 also referred to joint working and a co-ordinated review of Housing Panels; had any consideration been given to the pooling of resources or even with the Parish Councils.

This appeared to be the only anomaly arising from the old area assembly footprint, but rather than suggesting change now it would be recommended that this be reconfigured fresh in 2020. The Cabinet Member would be receiving a report shortly.

There could be instances where both the neighbourhood group and Parish Council might have same objective and which may require some collaborative working. Each occasion would be considered on a case by case basis.

- Training on the Strategy moving forward - would this be available for both Members and officers.

Training was scheduled at the beginning of October and Rotherfed were working on more bespoke training for community organisations.

Further discussion would take place on what was available for Members and officers with joint training where appropriate.

- Was there an impact on the Strategy for 2020 with the boundary and Ward profiles changing.

With the boundary changes there would be lead in time. Some Wards may be carrying forward money, but this would not be possible into 2020.

- Could consideration be given to a more dynamic strapline.

This would be fed back to the report authors and the title considered for the report moving forward.

- Page 44 made reference to the casework management system. Whilst the system was good it was not always easily accessible for some users.

The casework management system was developing and evolving. Feedback would be taken on board and eventually link with complaints.

- Page 50 made reference to the statistical analysis and the drawing out of common themes in the north, south and central areas of Rotherham. Unfortunately, whilst parish councils were very prominent in the south there were very few in the south and none in the central areas.

The information was noted. There was a need for better clarity and relevance in reporting as the multi-agency work with the clustering of wards could be confusing.

- Could the flexibility be retained for CLF monies with ward budgets.

The future of CLF and Ward budgets were still to be considered with some concerns expressed about a potential merger.

- Could there be further training in the use of social media.

Training in this area was to be scheduled shortly.

- Had the new post of Senior Communications Officer been appointed to.

Currently this post was still vacant following a recruitment process and the advert was being reissued.

- There was some evidence of good work in Rotherham, but this was not reflected in all Wards with little or no consultation with residents and partners or multi-agency meetings. There was an asset based approach to Ward working, but the Council was just about to demolish an asset without any communication or engagement with residents.

There was some inconsistency across Rotherham, but by working with the Head of Neighbourhoods with Ward Members issues could be addressed. The example of a building being demolished in a Ward without consultation could be used as a case study moving forward.

There was merit in moving forward and whilst some Wards that had not generated work like others, there was evidence of community activity and events taking place. Some of the devolved budget was also being held back for match funding.

- There were some issues with access to community centres, the difficulty in them being hired and accessible along with misunderstandings over asset transfers and the differences between capital and revenue funding streams.

Community centres should be easily accessible for the community.

Due to the cuts from Central Government the Council had low revenue, but was more capital rich. Should the plans for Thriving Neighbourhoods move forward then this should also add to revenue funding.

- Reference was made to disused land and the land ownership map by the Council not being completed.

This was being addressed.

- There was good evidence that this great initiative was working with spending contributing and aligning with the Ward plans with clear linkage. There was little merit in changing good initiatives so the Community Leadership Fund should remain as flexible as possible.

Wards could not keep rolling forward their pooled funding as this would be absorbed into the Council finances in 2020 and the reasons for the money not being spent in Wards should be challenged by residents.

- There were still some inconsistencies or policies in place and Page 47 made reference to the formalisation of Ward meetings. How would this be monitored and by whom.

Ward meetings were not monitored at moment and it was envisaged that a consistent standard would be developed by the Head of Neighbourhoods.

Resolved:- (1) That the review the Annual Report 2017/18 Neighbourhood Working including recommendations for future delivery be noted with the comments made at today's meeting.

(2) That the Thriving Neighbourhoods: The Rotherham Neighbourhood Strategy 2018-2025 document be noted.

(3) That the required training for Members and officers in relation to the working of Thriving Neighbourhoods be undertaken as soon as possible.

(4) That progress in relation to devolved budgets, governance framework (including monitoring of progress on Ward Plans and evaluation of them) be reported back to the Select Commission in six months' time.

21. HOUSING STRATEGY REFRESH - 2019-2022

Consideration was given to the Housing Strategy Refresh 2019-2022 presented by Tom Bell, Assistant Director of Housing, which had also been considered by the Health and Wellbeing Board at its meeting on 19th September, 2018.

Sarah Watts, Strategic Housing Manager, gave a presentation using PowerPoint outlining the details of the early draft and the comments received to date which would help shape the strategy:-

- 2016-19 Strategy – The 5 themes.
- Achievements.
- The New Strategy – a chance to have your say.
- Things that have changed.
- Overview of housing in Rotherham.
- Value of new housing.
- The Vision – Three Year Strategy and Refresh.
- Structure – five key priorities.
- Timetable for refresh – phases.
- Pipeline Projects.

A discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised and clarified:-

- The development of eco housing, but careful use of the term in case this had a negative effect.

- Meetings to consider Ward profiles and focus on the specific property requirements for young and active residents, but also around Adult Social Care, adapted properties and building communities.

Variations across the Wards were recognised and if specific property requirements were not reflected then evidence needed more refining to gain a better understanding of need.

- Gas servicing targets were 100%, but many householders had not yet got their documentation.

There would be investigation into the delay of households not being issued with gas certificates. Rother Living was a brand that was being attached to new housing tenures and houses for sale.

- From the key priorities how explicitly could some of the issues within Wards be addressed and could a map be made available of land for use within the Wards.

Meetings would take place to understand trends, new housing and demographics and this would be included within the Ward profiles and help to form the evidence base of any projects.

- Priorities for housing associations and working in partnership

There was a big push around home ownership and recognition that there was other tenures for people that needed affordable social housing and this needed to be retained in Rotherham for as long as possible.

Housing providers were accountable for around 5% of housing in the Borough. A forum of key providers would meet to develop projects at a City Region level.

The Service was in the process of mapping out what housing owned land Rotherham had access to and this would feed in the development pipeline. The Service would be working closely with the Council's general asset team to work together on different pieces of land and provide a greater picture of what was available.

Housing in Rotherham had been recognised as one of the top three performing social housing organisations in the country. It was also seen as an innovator in housing delivery, both of which were key to the Government agenda.

There was good consultation about right to buy with a need to feed back on the process. Rotherham was well placed to go and trial new approaches to make it work locally for building and replacing housing.

- Maintenance of existing properties and Ward walk arounds to highlight some of the problems.

A meeting would be set up a meeting with Repairs and Housing to walk around the estates with Ward members and pick up some observations. The Service was investing in more new posts for estate management providing more frontline officers on estate management issues.

- Could further information be provided on Section 106 agreements and update provided on the Community Infrastructure Ley.

Strategic housing acquisition programmes through Section 106 agreements were where the Council negotiated the purchase of properties at a discount usually around 60% of the market value. Value for money must be demonstrated and if it could not be then acquisitions were not made.

Liaison would take place with Planning and ascertain how a report could be brought back to the Select Commission.

- The Strategy referred to social value and contractors. Was there any appetite for this to include contractors paying the foundation living wage and not the Government's living wage?

Social value was incredibly important and the best deal would be sought from the investments across the Borough. £66 million was being used from the HRA for new homes.

Work was taking place with the local colleges and local schools and Waites had been appointed who distributed social value on their construction works. This would continue in terms of the thriving neighbourhoods agenda and ward priorities.

- Social mobility and health technology had advanced since implementation of Rothercare. What was the future of the phone line and were there any plans for this to be replaced.

Rothercare was facing a big journey in the digital agenda of assisted technologies to maintain independence in residents' own homes. Technology was moving at a pace and Rotherham had not kept up with this with Rothercare telecare system being thirty years out of date.

A review was being undertaken to explore options good to ensure that housing and adult care moving forward had the improvements as a specific priority in health and wellbeing.

- The vision was to revitalise the town centre and urban community, but there were more than one town centre.

In terms of the town centres it was not possible to do everything at the same time. The Council was trying to improve the residential offer in the town centre and with the resources had three sites identified. It was recognised that the Borough made up of a number of towns.

- Members would appreciate a modern complaints system and for local housing officers being involved in the first instance for people moving into rented properties. The Strategy itself referred to the need to prevent families from exploitation and financial hardship.

There were now more people in low cost home ownership/shared ownership. This could potentially help people with a lesser deposit. Consideration was being given to products around such as try before you buy rentals and then moving towards home ownership. There were some Government assistance purchase schemes. It was important that the right needs assessment was undertaken in localities where new developments were created to meet local need.

The Council's modern complaints system for housing took more enquires/interactions with customers covering thousands of repairs. Occasionally things did go wrong, but these were put right first time and where possible they would not happen again. It was with this action complaints were starting to reduce and not escalated at stage.

The Councillors' case management system was evolving and a process for making sure tenants' had a voice with involved interaction with the Repairs and Maintenance Service.

- Did the strategy meet the demand for specialist housing.

The Strategy enabled the Council to work on supported housing to meet needs best it could. There was an overwhelming demographic demand for accommodation and an accommodation plan was being used with Adult Care and Children Services so the Council was better informed about their requirements.

- Some insurance rules required a gas servicing certificate and to aid circulation could these be Ward generated and distributed with Ward leaflets.

Following last week's gas awareness week it was reported the Council were now 100% compliant with its gas safety checks. The next steps would be to start thinking about undertaking checks for private landlords.

- Had consideration been given to the installation of solar panels on new properties given the summer weather and savings that could be generated?

Action was already being taken on how to maximise income and minimise spend on areas like fuel. One key issue in the Housing Strategy helped with budgets with heavy investment into insulation and effective methods of keeping properties warm.

There were a number of problems with the Government's feed in tariffs and grants for solar panels. Whilst the use of solar panels would not be discounted in the future and smart investments revisited, consideration also had to be given to access, repairs and what happened with the equipment should tenants move to ensure householders remained safe.

Resolved:- (1) That the information and presentation be noted.

(2) That a copy of the revised slides be circulated to the Improving Places Select Commission.

(3) That consideration be given to a future report on progress of Section 106 Agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy.

22. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That the next meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission take place on Thursday, 1st November, 2018 at 1.30 p.m.