

**IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
17th October, 2012**

Present:- Councillor Whysall (in the Chair); Councillors Andrews, Astbury, Atkin, Ellis, Gilding, Gosling, N. Hamilton, Jepson, Read, P. A. Russell, Sims, Swift and Wright.

Together with:- Councillor R. S. Russell (Cabinet Member for Waste and Emergency Planning), Councillor Smith (Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Development) and co-opted members Mr. D. Corkell and Mr. T. Roche.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dodson, Falvey, Foden, Havenhand, Johnston and Wallis.

25. WELCOME TO CO-OPTED MEMBER

The Chairman welcomed Mr. Terry Roche, a newly-appointed co-opted member, who was attending his first meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission.

26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at this meeting.

27. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

28. COMMUNICATIONS

There were no matters to report.

29. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION HELD ON 5TH SEPTEMBER, 2012

Resolved:- (1) That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission, held on 5th September, 2012, be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

(2) That a progress report about agreements made in accordance with Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 be submitted to the next meeting of this Select Commission.

30. COLLECTION OF HOUSEHOLD REFUSE - WINTER WORKING ARRANGEMENTS 2012/2013

The Select Commission received a presentation from Councillor R. S. Russell (Cabinet Member for Waste and Emergency Planning) describing the household waste collection arrangements for the forthcoming Winter months, which will last from Monday, 26th November, 2012 until Friday, 29th March, 2013. Members viewed the information leaflets which will be distributed to households.

Resolved:- That the information be noted.

(The Chairman authorised consideration of the above item at this meeting, to enable Members to be informed of the revised arrangements prior to the commencement date)

31. ROTHERHAM TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

The Select Commission received a presentation from the Business and retail Investment Manager entitled "Rotherham town centre and the Portas pilot", concerning the regeneration of the Rotherham town centre. The presentation highlighted the following issues:-

: during 2009 and 2010, the recession and the banking crisis were the cause of a difficult period for town centre retail high streets, throughout the country;

: various initiatives were introduced to try and regenerate the retail sector in the Rotherham town centre (50 new businesses began during 2010 and there was a reduction in the number of vacant retail units); modest results were achieved;

: during September 2011, preparation work began for the pilot visit of retail adviser Mary Portas (there was extensive media coverage of this event);

: the perceived problems of the town centre are not unique to Rotherham, but are shared by many town centres throughout the country;

: the Portas pilot visit had been well received by the town centre businesses (which were assessed during the pilot scheme as providing a unique retail experience for the customer); the scheme attracted some grant funding to assist with the regeneration of the Rotherham town centre; there will shortly be a 'mystery shopper' exercise involving town centre shops;

: details were provided of the 'town centre package' (support for existing and new businesses in the town centre), which included vitality grants for businesses; business development grants for existing, profitable businesses; advice and support for businesses; customer service training; marketing training; and increased promotional work to attract customers to the town centre;

: there is potential for a 'leisure offer' to be introduced into the Rotherham town centre;

: the difficulties caused by the nearby retail competition (eg: the out-of-town shopping centres at Parkgate and at Meadowhall);

: footfall (ie: numbers of people visiting) is the main measure of a town centre's retail vitality; and since June 2011, Rotherham is the only town in England which has not suffered a reduction in town centre footfall; however, there still needs to be an increase in footfall in Rotherham and for that footfall to produce increased spending in town centre shops;

: a change to the town centre landscape will occur with the forthcoming development of the new Tesco supermarket, which will have an impact upon

town centre retail stores (eg: the Forge Island and at Corporation Street); it is anticipated that the supermarket will attract new customers to the Rotherham town centre; it was suggested that the Rotherham market ought to be developed to attract more customers, especially those migrating from the new supermarket;

: the Forge Island site (currently the location of the existing Tesco supermarket) will eventually require redevelopment, perhaps for leisure purposes, eg: cinema/theatre;

: the development of the Council's Riverside House office building and the New York football stadium has helped with the regeneration of that part of the town centre;

: the development of the Minster Gardens has also enhanced the attractiveness of the town centre; new businesses are now opening on High Street;

: the building of new properties has increased the number of people living in the town centre (most accommodation is for tenants, rather than property owner-occupiers);

: the reconstruction of the Rotherham railway station has now been completed; construction of the tram-train route, linking Sheffield, Rotherham and Parkgate, will soon begin;

: a larger number of students are being encouraged to study at the Rotherham College of Arts and Technology, increasing the possibility of a campus-style development;

Members asked various questions after the presentation:-

: the cost of car parking in Rotherham and (for the local authority) the costs of and income generated by town centre car parking;

: the policing of the town centre; Rotherham is considered to be a safe place, compared to some other town centres, despite some negative public perceptions;

: the need to ensure that town centre development will link together and that vacant and under-used property is quickly brought back into use; concerns were expressed that the town centre strategy sometimes prevents certain development taking place and may have a detrimental impact upon smaller retail centres elsewhere in the Rotherham Borough area.

Resolved:- That the information provided about the regeneration of the Rotherham town centre be noted.

32. SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYMENT

The Select Commission received a presentation from the Regeneration Manager describing a number of schemes which were intended to support increased employment opportunities in the South Yorkshire City Region. The presentation highlighted:-

- : apprenticeships and schemes for young people aged 16 to 24 years are a priority;
- : various grants and incentives are available for employers;
- : the National Apprenticeship Service, which provided support for small and medium enterprises, has now been reduced;
- : details were noted of the City Deal (a small amount of grant funding is being made available for apprenticeships in the City Region);
- : ensuring that the skills being acquired at school and in college are appropriate for local employers;
- : the various apprenticeships being made available within the Borough Council;
- : the supply chain project – organised with the two companies which carry out the maintenance of Council properties;
- : the Government's work programme (delivered in the Rotherham Borough area by A4E and Serco) to bring people from into work, so that they will have reduced dependency upon benefits;
- : the JobCentre Plus programmes, providing shorter-term work experience;
- : Enterprise Allowances provide support for people attempting to establish their own businesses;
- : sector-based work academies – providing training in the type of work available in the local area;
- : the Youth Contract, including wages incentives and voluntary work experience;
- : the Big Lottery Talent Match (a bid for funding for the City Region);
- : the role of the Council's Regeneration Team (Environment and Development Services) in assisting the creation of employment opportunities;
- : the role of the Rotherham Economy Board and the Skills Board.

Members requested the provision of additional information about the comparative rates of unemployment affecting men, women and recent graduates.

Resolved:- That the information provided about the support for employment schemes in the Rotherham Borough area be noted.

33. HOUSING STRATEGY

Consideration was given to a report, presented by the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services, concerning Rotherham's Housing Strategy which is being rewritten to take account of public spending reductions and changes in national housing policy. A new draft Housing Strategy was produced in May,

2012 and was the subject of a comprehensive programme of consultation between June and August, 2012. The draft Strategy has been updated to take account of feedback from Elected Members, Council staff, partner agencies, the voluntary and community sector and from Rotherham Borough residents and is now undergoing the required process for final approval and endorsement. After consideration by the Improving Places Select Commission, the report and draft Strategy will be presented to Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods and ultimately Cabinet for approval. The publication of Rotherham's updated Housing Strategy is scheduled for the end of November, 2012.

The submitted report summarised the consultation programme and the way in which consultation has taken place, concurrently, on other key matters so as to ensure a holistic approach to strategic housing issues.

The Select Commission's consideration of this item included the following salient issues:-

: the efforts made to ensure that the Strategy is a shorter, usable document and one which will last for thirty years;

: the various commitments listed within the report;

: the consultation process undertaken as part of the development of the Strategy;

: the need to increase investment in the Council's housing stock, to ensure that the provision of housing is appropriate to the requirements of the Borough's population; reference was made to the proposed building of new houses during the next three years;

: the Council's buying back of former Council houses, which had previously been purchased by tenants under the 'Right to Buy' scheme;

: ways of tackling anti-social behaviour in neighbourhoods, including the recruitment and role of the Housing champions; sometimes there are problems caused by younger tenants creating a level of noise which disturbs their elderly neighbours; details were provided of action taken against tenants who had committed various types of anti-social behaviour; the problem was considered to be significant, although the number of reported incidents has reduced during the past year (comparisons were provided between Rotherham and the three other South Yorkshire city/district councils);

: the energy efficiency of housing; the problems caused by fuel poverty;

: provision of housing to meet the needs of people with a disability;

: assistance made available for people who struggle to maintain their own homes;

: working with property owners in the private rented sector;

: working to try and help those people who have difficulties in affording the cost of buying their own homes;

: the length of Housing tenancies and the proposed introduction of fixed-term tenancies; the policy will attempt to ensure that larger housing is available to families which need such accommodation; this issue will be the subject of further debate by this Select Commission; (reference, the consideration of the Council's Allocation of Council Housing and Strategic Tenancy policies – Minute No. 30 of the meeting of the Cabinet Member and Advisers for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods held on 15th October 2012);

: some local authorities (eg: Leeds City Council), currently subsidise people who down-size (ie: move from a larger to a smaller property); Rotherham MBC does not provide such financial support to tenants, although the possibility remains under consideration; it was noted that there may be an impact upon people's welfare benefits, should they not decide to down-size properties;

: some caution was expressed about the provision of houses which contained one bedroom only;

: in cases of the eviction of tenants, it was noted that the evidence provided for the introductory tenancy appeal hearings has to be of a very high standard;

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and the contents of the draft Housing Strategy be noted.

(2) That the Improving Places Select Commission expresses the view that it is generally supportive of the aims of the revised Housing Strategy and asks that its comments are taken into account in the preparation of the final version of the Strategy.

(3) That a report be submitted to the next meeting of this Select Commission on the various housing issues, now discussed, including repairs, computer systems used for lettings and the Council's Allocation of Council Housing and Strategic Tenancy policies.