

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 14 December 2021

Present:- Councillors Atkin, Burnett (Vice-Chair), Cowen, Ellis, Hughes, Jones, McNeely, Mills, Sansome, Tinsley and Wyatt (Chair).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barley, Havard, Jacques, Khan, Pitchley and Whomersley and the co-optees Ms. Bacon and Ms. Jacques.

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

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

37. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 2 NOVEMBER 2021

Resolved:-

1. That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 2 November 2021 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Hughes declared a personal interest in respect of the Allotments Self-management Update as a close family member was currently serving as Chair of the Rotherham Allotments Alliance. Cllr Atkin declared a personal interest in respect of the Town Centre Update as a close family member was currently attending the university.

39. 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 to ask a question in respect of matters on the agenda.

40. 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.

41. TOWN CENTRE UPDATE

Consideration was given to an update presentation on delivery of developments in Rotherham Town Centre associated with the Town Centre Masterplan which was adopted by Rotherham MBC in 2017. This Town Centre Masterplan set out an exciting number of developments that will transform and revitalise the town centre, with a vibrant leisure scheme on Forge Island, attractive outdoor spaces, revitalised markets complex and high-quality riverside and urban living. The update presentation provided the latest updates on these projects.

In discussion, clarification was requested around plans to highlight and celebrate local heritage sites of interest and uniqueness, such as the chapel on the bridge. The response from officers indicated that consideration would be given to sites of note and thought given to how best to link up non-retail experiences in the Town Centre.

In view of some of the goals for sustainable and green objectives in the Town Centre shifting during the implementation phase, members suggested partnering with area organisations such as the university to help drive quality in the developments over time, and to continue to look for creative ways to achieve these green and clean energy solutions over the long term.

Members requested assurances that consideration would be given to the design of the university centre with a view to attracting students. The response from officers noted the use of modern methods of construction. The service monitored the progress of similar buildings being built as pilot sites for sustainable, net zero construction in neighbouring areas, with a view to implementing similar methods.

Resolved:-

1. That the update be noted.
2. That consideration be given to how best to highlight and link up non-retail experiences of cultural and historical significance in the Town Centre and throughout the Borough.
3. That consideration be given to highlighting and celebrating the chapel on a hill and other sites of local interest and uniqueness in the Borough.
4. That consideration be given to ensuring accessibility throughout the Town Centre including appropriate provision for parking to encourage visitors from outside the Borough who wish to travel by car.
5. That the service continue to look for creative ways to achieve green priorities and clean energy solutions in the Town Centre in the long term.
6. That the service continue to strengthen relationships with partners and organisations in the Town Centre with a view to cooperatively driving and sustaining quality.

42. ALLOTMENTS SELF-MANAGEMENT UPDATE

Consideration was given to an update report which outlines progress associated with the transfer of operational responsibility for the management of the Borough's allotments from the Council to a community benefit company, Rotherham Allotment Alliance (RAA). The update provided information regarding the recent achievements, activities, challenges and future steps for the management and administration of these allotments.

In discussion, Members requested clarification around the role of the Councillors who serve as directors of the RAA. The response from the Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion noted the need for a second Councillor representative to serve on the Board and welcomed any expressions of interest from Members of the Commission.

Further clarification was requested around the parameters of the Allotments Act. The response from the Cabinet Member and officers clarified the relationship between parish councils and the RAA to explain that allotments under the jurisdiction of parish councils were outside the scope of the update.

Clarification was requested around a particular allotments site. The response from the Allotments Administrator noted the ongoing efforts to educate plot holders, to put rents back into improvements despite COVID challenges, and to move forward using the Community Payback scheme and labour arrangements whereby the RAA provides a toilet and a skip for labourers who undertake the work themselves.

Given the health and wellbeing benefits associated with allotments, members expressed interest in opportunities for external funding. The RAA Administrator and Chair described various avenues for external funding beyond the Community Payback schemes, including Serenity which supports addiction recovery and mental health. The Chair of RAA expressed gratitude for Councillors who had contributed community leadership funds to support allotments by paying for security cameras.

Members requested clarification around the future of a further site. The response from the Cabinet Member and officer noted that under the Allotments Act, if land has historically been used for a substantial length of time as allotments, the land cannot be repurposed. Therefore, a Council-owned site that has previously been used as allotments is available to the RAA should there be future increase in demand.

Members expressed interest in knowing more details around the process involved in making plots accessible. The response from the RAA Chair and Administrator described previous and ongoing efforts to retrofit existing plots for wheelchair access and to ensure new site plans are designed for accessibility. There was more work to do in this area, but progress had been made in respect of accessible allotments.

Toward promoting an inclusive and diverse culture among allotment holders, members inquired as to the availability of literature in multiple languages. The Administrator noted that no letters were posted out and that communications take place on social media, but that the use of multiple languages in these communications could be explored.

Members also expressed curiosity if there were any trends emerging in terms of complaints. The response from the Cabinet Member and officer noted that the Council had received no complaints from Allotment plot holders since the handover to self-administration. RAA Chair noted that any complaints received from the community are related to burning at the Rawmarsh site, which had been addressed. It was further noted that the particular site holder who had frequently been burning had discontinued leasing the allotment.

Regarding the unlet plots, Members requested clarification around efforts to improve these to a lettable condition. The response from the RAA described the ongoing efforts to improve the plots which have become unlettable due to flooding and/or overgrown conditions. When this is the case, the plot is let rent-free.

1. That the update be noted, and that the next update be presented in 12 months' time.
2. That consideration be given to how best to reach prospective allotment holders in more languages.

43. FINDINGS FROM SPOTLIGHT REVIEW OF EXTERNAL FUNDING

Consideration was given to a summary of Members' findings from the 12 November 2021 spotlight review of external funding sources for regeneration and transformation.

Resolved:-

1. That the findings and slide presentation be noted.
2. That the ambition of the service in submitting bids be commended.
3. That the feedback from the government regarding the Dinnington and Wath bids for Levelling Up Funds be circulated to Members when available.

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4. That the governance advisor liaise with the Regeneration Strategy Team to coordinate upcoming scrutiny work on markets with a view to this work feeding into the markets-related elements of future bids.
5. That efforts to ensure Rotherham receives its fair portion of gainshare or “single pot” funds from the Mayoral Combined Authority be noted.

44. WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to an updated work programme schedule for the remainder of the 2021/22 municipal year.

Resolved:-

1. That the report and proposed schedule of work be noted.
2. That authority be delegated to the Governance Advisor in consultation with the Chair and Vice-chair to make changes to the schedule of work as appropriate between meetings, reporting any changes back to the next meeting for endorsement.

45. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that there were no urgent items of business requiring a decision at the meeting.

46. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Chair announced the next meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission will take place on 1 February 2022, commencing at 1.30 pm in Rotherham Town Hall.