

GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Growth Scrutiny Committee of the Bolsover District Council held in Chamber Suite 2, The Arc, Clowne, on Wednesday 23rd September 2015 at 1000 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor S. W Fritchley in the Chair

Councillors; T. Alexander, A. Anderson, M. Dixey, S. Statter, B. Watson and J. Wilson.

Officers; G. Galloway (Assistant Director – Property and Estates), C. Millington (Scrutiny Officer) and A. Bluff (Governance Officer).

0366. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P. Barnes, J.A. Clifton and P. Smith.

0367. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business to consider.

0368. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

0369. MINUTES – 29TH JULY 2015

Moved by Councillor A. Anderson, seconded by Councillor J. Wilson

RESOLVED that the minutes of a Growth Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 29th July 2015 be approved as a true and correct record.

0370. LIST OF KEY DECISIONS AND ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE

Members considered the current List of Key Decisions and Items to be Considered in Private document.

Moved and seconded

RESOLVED that the current List of Key Decisions and Items to be Considered in Private document be noted.

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0371. DRAFT EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY

The Empty Properties Officer attended the meeting to provide an update to Members in relation to the Council's draft Empty Property Strategy.

The Empty Properties Officer post was created in March 2015 to deal with empty properties across both Bolsover and North East Derbyshire Districts. There were 724 long term empty properties in Bolsover District, of which, 300 had been empty for over 2 years.

Returning empty properties to use had been identified as a government priority which had been reinforced by the introduction of the New Homes Bonus (NHB) scheme in 2010. The New Homes Bonus scheme provided a financial reward equivalent to the council tax income for each new build or empty property returned to use for six years.

The draft Strategy outlined the measures available in the "Empty Property Toolkit" to help return empty properties to use in a sustainable manner so that they remained occupied for the long term.

Empty Property work also tied in with the Council's objectives to improve housing standards, provide additional affordable housing and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour as detailed in corporate plans, policies and strategies.

The Empty Homes Strategy would build on the work being carried out by the Council's enforcement officers by developing robust procedures to implement further measures such as Enforced Sale, Compulsory Purchase and Empty Dwelling Management Orders.

The Strategy would make use of best practice currently being utilised successfully on a national scale whilst taking the opportunity to develop innovative schemes and projects and to work in partnerships at a local and community level.

The Strategy also concluded with a comprehensive action plan which detailed the specific objectives and targets relating to empty property work, the timeline for when they would be implemented and the lead officer in each case.

The Empty Properties Officer informed the meeting that he had carried out a survey of all long term empty properties in the District.

In response to a Member's question, the Empty Properties Officer replied that empty properties did not take derelict land into consideration, i.e., land purchased for the purpose of land banking.

A Member queried the percentage of response from owners of empty properties surveyed and also their feedback and comments. The Empty Properties Officer replied that 31% had responded to the survey with the main issue being around finance. Some empty property owners had inherited properties and were unsure of how to deal with them. Some owners were land banking and some were absent landlords who had purchased properties cheaply but had then found they were too costly to improve.

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A Member noted that even though some houses could be improved substantially, they remained empty due to being in undesirable areas across the District and this was an issue that also needed addressing.

The Empty Properties Officer also noted that councils' charged up to 50% council tax on an empty property but applied the full council tax charge after a 3 month period even if the property remained empty.

A Member referred to the appendix in the Strategy in relation to the Assessment Framework for prioritising empty properties for enforcement and asked for clarification on the definitions used for the point's scheme.

A question was asked regarding what Members could do to help and the Empty Properties Officer noted that local knowledge was key and as Members knew their wards/parishes very well this would be valuable to the Council's objectives in relation to empty properties.

Members agreed that the Empty Properties Officer should look to produce a local data base of ward information for the Committee, which would enable Members to be involved in tackling empty properties.

The draft Strategy would now be submitted to the Strategic Alliance Management Team and follow the route to Executive for approval from there.

Moved by Councillor S. Fritchley, seconded by Councillor T. Alexander

RESOLVED that (1) the draft Empty Property Strategy be noted and submitted to SAMT before being considered by the Executive,

(2) the Empty Properties Officer should look to produce a local data base of ward information for the Committee, which would enable Members to be involved in tackling empty properties.

(Empty Properties Officer)

The Empty Properties Officer left the meeting.

0372. UPDATE ON BUSINESS ENTERPRISE GROUP (BEG)

The Assistant Director – Property and Estates provided a verbal update to Members on the work of the Business Enterprise Group (BEG).

Members raised concern that as part of their work on the Growth agenda, they were not being properly notified of the work of the BEG, further Members had only had one meeting with Derek Mapp (at Creswell) but had heard nothing since.

Members were informed that two meetings of the Group had taken place with various business owners and trainers providing their services in an advisory capacity.

Advice from these business owners and trainers had also been sought for the Council's business hub, the Tangent, based in Shirebrook. The feedback received was that

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marketing of the Tangent required improvement and more engagement with tenants was also needed. The Tangent was now 91% occupied.

Phase 2 of the Tangent would be looking at a different type of letting, being light industrial, and plans for this were being drawn up. A business case would be needed along with Member approval at Council.

In response to a Members question, the Assistant Director – Property and Estates, stated that the Council was not currently paying for any business advice received from Derek Mapp.

A third meeting of the BEG had been arranged for October and some advisors would be travelling from Oxford. The Assistant Director – Property and Estates noted that all the advisors seemed genuinely happy to help and provide advice at any time.

One of the Council's major areas was Pleasley Vale, which would require £5 million investment over the next 30 years to bring some of the mills up to date so that they were fit for purpose. A recent Heritage Lottery Fund bid for Mill 1 had been unsuccessful and the Council was now looking for a Private Sector Investor.

It was suggested that Pleasley Vale could be more suited to a potential housing/retail mix. The Assistant Director – Property and Estates suggested that Committee Members visited Pleasley Vale before the tour of the District took place on 26th October in order for all Growth Scrutiny Committee to appreciate the site.

It was noted that the Council needed to encourage local businesses to grow and develop so that they stayed in the District.

As Members were aware, the Council was also looking to bring 200 empty properties back into use and 400 hectares of unused land to generate a capital receipt of £1m. Rogers Avenue Garage site in Creswell was earmarked for housing development and the Asset Management Group was looking at where there was a need for new houses (new builds) in the District.

The Assistant Director – Property and Estates further advised Members that a sweep of all public owned land in the District had been undertaken for potential business development. The Council had also purchased a Register of Public Ownership which was updated once per year. The Register was valuable to the Council as it showed instantly who owned land in the District.

A short discussion took place.

Moved by Councillor S. Fritchley, seconded by Councillor T. Alexander
RESOLVED that the update be received.

The Assistant Director – Property and Estates left the meeting.

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0373. CORPORATE PLAN TARGET: SUPPORT 200 YOUNG PEOPLE TO RAISE THEIR ASPIRATIONS AND PROVIDE THEM WITH RELEVANT EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS BY DECEMBER 2015

Members had previously queried the target date of December 2015 for Corporate Plan target, 'support 200 young people to raise their aspirations and provide them with relevant employability skills by December 2015', which was approved in July 2015 and whether this target was achievable given the timescale. The response received from the Chief Executive's and Partnership Manager indicated that when the team provided the SMART targets for the Talent Match Programme, this was on the basis that they were from April 2014 to December 2015 (however, the Corporate Plan was now from 2015). As this was an old Corporate Plan Target which crossed over into a new one, the team needed to include 2014.

In the new Corporate Plan the previous 2011-15 Corporate Plan Target had been re-written slightly and now read, 'support 200 young people to raise their aspirations and provide them with relevant employability skills by December 2015', with no reference to Talent Match solely but covered a more broader "Raising Aspirations" headline but it does not state when this is to start from.

Therefore, if the figures from 2014 to date are to be included, then the team had already achieved 230 which were made up of outputs from Talent Match, Apprenticeship Scheme, Raising Aspirations and Ambition.

Members requested that the target be reviewed in line with the Corporate Plan timescales and a revised, more challenging target be submitted for Members approval.

RESOLVED that Members' comments be fed back to the Chief Executive's and Partnerships Team and a reviewed target be requested in line with the Corporate Plan Timescale.

(Scrutiny Officer)

0374. WORK PLAN

Members considered their 2015/16 work plan programme.

Members requested that the work plan be updated to reflect the extra work in respect of Empty Properties.

Moved and seconded

RESOLVED that the work plan be updated to reflect the extra work in respect of Empty Properties.

(Scrutiny Officer)

The meeting of the Growth Scrutiny Committee concluded at 1155 hours.