

GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Growth Scrutiny Committee of the Bolsover District Council held as a Virtual Meeting and Live Streamed on Wednesday, 15 July 2020 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor Jen Wilson in the Chair

Councillors Tricia Clough (Vice-Chair), Derek Adams, Jim Clifton, David Dixon, Tom Kirkham, Tom Munro, Graham Parkin, Peter Roberts and James Watson.

Officers:- Chris Fridlington (Assistant Director – Development), Karl Apps (Joint Housing Strategy and Growth Manager), Amar Bashir (Improvement Officer), John Hendy (Senior Planning Officer), Joanne Wilson (Scrutiny and Elections Officer), Alison Bluff (Governance Officer), Liz Robinson (Accountancy Assistant) and Tom Scott (Governance Officer).

Also in attendance at the meeting were Councillor Mary Dooley (Portfolio Holder - Partnerships and Transformation) and Councillor Liz Smyth (Portfolio Holder - Economic Development).

GRO4-20/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Chris Kane and Sandra Peake (Portfolio Holder for Housing).

GRO5-20/21 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

The Chair advised Committee that she had consented to 2 urgent items of business to be considered at this meeting being the Council's Empty Property Strategy 2021-2024 and the Council's Housing Strategy 2021-2025.

GRO6-20/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

GRO7-20/21 MINUTES - 26TH FEBRUARY 2020

Moved by Councillor Jen Wilson and seconded by Councillor Tom Munro
RESOLVED that the Minutes of a Growth Scrutiny Committee held on 26th February 2020 be approved as a correct record.

Recorded Vote: Councillor James Watson abstained from voting and requested that this

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be recorded in the Minutes.

GRO8-20/21 EXTRAORDINARY MINUTES - 10TH JUNE 2020

Moved by Councillor Jen Wilson and seconded by Councillor Tricia Clough
RESOLVED that the Minutes of an Extraordinary Growth Scrutiny Committee held on 10th June 2020 be approved as a correct record.

GRO9-20/21 LIST OF KEY DECISIONS AND ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE

Committee considered the list of Key Decisions and items to be considered in private document.

A report in relation to a contract extension for an existing framework to welfare adaptations to Council owned properties had been previously circulated to Members for consultation. Members were reminded to provide any comments or observations they had on the report to the Assistant Director Development or the Strategic Repairs Manager. The report would be taken by delegated decision.

Members were advised of 3 further urgent decisions which had been made at the July meeting of Executive. These items had come forward after the List of Key Decisions had been published: 'Purchase of Section 106 properties from Rippon Homes off Ball Hill, South Normanton', 'Purchase of Employment Land at Shirebrook' and 'Re-Imagining Pleasley Vale'.

A Member queried why the item in relation to Ball Hill, South Normanton was exempt. The Assistant Director – Development advised the meeting that it was the cost to the Authority to purchase the 3 properties on Ball Hill which was confidential.

Moved by Councillor Jen Wilson and seconded by Councillor Graham Parkin
RESOLVED that the List of Key Decisions and items to be considered in private document including the 3 urgent items as detailed above be noted.

Recorded Vote – Councillor James Watson abstained from voting and requested that this be recorded in the Minutes.

GRO10-20/21 CORPORATE PLAN TARGETS PERFORMANCE UPDATE - JANUARY TO MARCH 2020 (Q4 - 2019/20)

Committee considered a report which provided the Quarter 4 outturns (January to March 2020) for the Corporate Plan 2019/20, which sat under the 'unlocking our growth potential' aim as at 31st March 2020.

There were 7 targets in total of which 4 had been achieved – G01, G08, G13 & G17. 1 target had been achieved previously – G05. 1 target had failed – G11 and 1 target was

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awaiting information G10.

With regard to 4 of the performance targets, queries had been raised at the Scrutiny pre meeting by the Chair and Vice Chair and responses to those queries had been circulated to Members as follows;

G 10 – Enable the development of at least 272 new residential properties within the district by March 2020.

Is there a confirmed date when this will be available? Can we assume a similar target is included under the new framework?

Officer response;

The annual housing target was taken from the Local Plan. There would be an annual target and this would be taken from the local plan for the lifetime of the new plan. The annual completion figure was collated by the planning department but they have to visit the sites to make the count and they have not been able to do this.

Housing delivery in the District is reviewed annually and facilitate delivery to meet the annual target of 272 new homes.

G 11 – Through a programme of targeted refurbishment bring 10 empty private sector properties back into use per annum.

Members appreciate the work that is being done in this area. What does the target/action for this service area look like under the new Ambitions?

Officer response;

Prepare and adopt a new Empty Property Strategy by January 2021 to support the Council's vision to bring empty properties back into use.

Bring 5 empty properties back into use per year through assistance and enforcement measures.

G 13 - Work with partners to deliver an average of 20 units of affordable homes each year.

Is it possible to get a summary of where the 28 units are? Are they Dragonfly developments or via another means?

Officer response;

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GRO11-20/21 DRAFT BOLSOVER TOURISM STRATEGY

Committee considered a report which provided an outline of the key points and the strategic aim of the emerging Bolsover Tourism Strategy.

The draft Strategy was appended to the report and any feedback from Committee would be part of the consultation process prior to the draft Strategy being submitted to Executive.

During March 2020, targeted consultation on the draft strategy had taken place with members of the Culture and Tourism partnership group, neighbouring authorities and visitor economy businesses on the Council's mailing list for the Bolsover Ebulletin. 32 comments had been received and considered and the strategy amended accordingly.

Bolsover District's main attractions were Hardwick Hall, Bolsover Castle and Creswell Crags. There were four main hotels that offered 80% of the bed space in the District but with no clear relationship between the main attractions. There were low numbers of caravan and camp sites and holiday lets which meant the proportion of stays in self-catering accommodation was 1.49% compared to 17% across the rest of Derbyshire.

89.2% of visits to the District were from day visitors. National trends indicated a growing demand for short breaks, health and well-being breaks and intergenerational breaks and camping and caravanning. This demand meant the Council's Strategy should encourage more overnight stays and more visitor expenditure.

In order to help achieve this, the Council needed to work alongside its partners to improve the overall visitor economy offer, improve the accommodation offer, maximise marketing potential, improve visitor economy business engagement and continue to improve the amount and quality of our intelligence and evidence in respect of the visitor economy.

Specific actions included;

- working to promote the District making the most of its excellent accessibility as a central part of a wider area to enhance its attractiveness as a short break destination
- working more closely with our neighbouring local authorities to promote tourism and to look to improve services on the Robin Hood Line
- Visit Sleep Cycle Repeat projects: looking at the feasibility of a Pleasley visitor hub and camping pods at Pleasley Pit Country Park; and an audit of cycle trails in the District
- producing a visitor economy brochure and walking/cycling publications, producing an attractions / visitor economy brochure
- making the best use of a PR and social media and marketing plan
- improving the District's representation on tourism websites
- establishing a visitor economy business network and encouraging staff and partners to add a link to the District's tourism webpage on external emails.

It was intended that the Strategy would be a living document and updated as and when new information was found.

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However, the draft strategy had been written prior to the Covid 19 lockdown and from March through to early July much of the visitor economy in the District was closed with income streams supporting jobs and livelihoods abruptly halted. Nonetheless, there had been small signs of economic life as some accommodation had housed key workers and met emergency housing needs. Some cafes, pubs and restaurants offered a take away service and certain businesses were able to open earlier subject to safe social distancing measures. The Council's Economic Development team had offered much support to visitor economy businesses during this time and the Bolsover Ebulletin could inform businesses quickly with clear messages about support measures that were becoming available. Other active engagement had helped to formulate a £500 Covid Recovery Grant Scheme and other businesses closely related to hospitality and leisure received discretionary grants to help ensure supply chains would also be able to survive.

For the foreseeable future, the visitor economy attractions would be operating at a reduced capacity, therefore, the strategy's strategic aim to 'increase' visitors, the number and duration of overnight stays and visitor expenditure, would be difficult to achieve this year but the Council would continue to take action to promote and encourage recovery of the visitor economy. Most recently, the Council had encouraged local businesses to take up the offer of free listings on Visit Chesterfield's website and a number of funding opportunities to improve the cycle network were being pursued. There were a number of actions the Council could keep working on within the emerging strategy that would help build a better future for the District's visitor economy.

The Assistant Director – Development noted that further work was required on the Strategy in relation to accessibility for people who were less mobile due to disabilities etc. Members welcomed the Strategy and raised the following points;

- no reference in the Strategy regarding accessibility to the use of public toilets which is an important part of tourism for people with disabilities and also the elderly
- if the key element of the Strategy was the promotion of overnight accommodation then the diversity of that offer needed to be looked at i.e., town centres and bed and breakfast etc
- demographics in relation to the type of accommodation that people prefer to stay in overnight not just the lack of camping and caravanning sites in the District
- look at the wider area outside of the District and include areas such as Doncaster, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, South Yorkshire and the Peak District
- where would the other types of overnight accommodation be? Need to look at the local plan
- ensure existing accommodation, not just in the District, i.e., Bassetlaw and Chesterfield have all written literature in relation to BDC attractions
- to what extent will the Creswell to Poolsbrook cycle trail be promoted?
- Identify the suitable sites for camping and motorhomes in the Strategy
- Walks in the District need publicity
- cycling routes – many are not completely joined up
- the 4 main towns in the District are noted as market towns but Clowne has not had a market presence for a long time

The Assistant Director – Development advised the meeting that work was being undertaken to join up cycling networks and a funding bid was being submitted to Sustrans. This work also formed part of the economic recovery as well as the visitor

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economy. In response to Members' queries, he advised that the DfT funding referred to in the action plan in the Strategy was not reliant on HS2 going forward. Also, there had been an offer from the MPs Office to support the proposal of the cycle track via the former Coalite site.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development thanked Members for their comments. She noted that the District had a huge amount of potential and if numbers of overnight stays could be increased then the number of full time employed people in the tourism industry could also be increased.

Moved by Councillor Tom Munro and seconded by Councillor Tricia Clough

RESOLVED that (1) the draft Tourism Strategy be noted,
(2) Members comments as detailed in the above bullet points be provided as part of the consultation process to the Executive.

(Assistant Director – Development)

GRO12-20/21 COVID 19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

The Assistant Director – Development provided a verbal update to the meeting regarding business continuity and business recovery work carried out by the Development directorate during the ongoing Covid 19 lockdown.

The Assistant Director – Development had been supporting Housing staff at the Riverside Depot over the previous few months. The Housing Repairs team had worked on all void Council properties during lockdown (around 60 properties) and all necessary works had been completed and the properties ready to be let.

Property Services contractors had also restarted works, for example, on Safe and Warm schemes and roofing work to Council properties. This had helped get contractors back in to work who otherwise would have been struggling due to furlough.

With regard to Commercial Services, a small number of tenants at the Tangent and Pleasley Vale had requested a payment holiday from their business rent with a repayment schedule to start around October time. A few tenants had given notice and left, however, there was still a demand for space and more units were being let currently than had been for a long time.

The Economic Development team had been busy working on an economic recovery plan. There were around 30 action points in the plan including helping to administer grant funding such as small business rates relief from Revenues and Benefits, recovery funds from the Partnership Team for ppe and sanitiser etc, and the discretionary grant fund which had delivered more than £600k of funding to over 70 businesses. Town Centre Regeneration work was also ongoing during this time.

The Assistant Director – Development noted that business resilience in the District to the Covid 19 Pandemic had been amazing. The District had a local distinct offer which bigger towns did not have for businesses. Logistics in the District was also in huge demand because of Covid 19 and Brexit.

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Similar work was being undertaken in relation to business resilience due to the hype of a second spike of Covid 19 in September / October. This included the digital offer and websites for businesses operating on the internet.

A Member queried if all of the discretionary grant allowed to the Council had now been paid out to businesses in the District. The Assistant Director – Development replied that £604k had been paid out of the £620k grant from the Government. The residual was due to monies being returned where a business had received funding from elsewhere, however, £18k of this had now been committed. A report providing a breakdown of how the funding had been allocated would be presented to Members at a future meeting. The Assistant Director – Development also noted that the funding paid out had helped to safeguard around 500 jobs.

Moved and seconded
RESOLVED that the update be noted.

GRO13-20/21 URGENT ITEMS

Empty Property Strategy

Committee considered a report in relation to the development of a draft Empty Property Strategy 2021-2024.

The current Empty Property Strategy was a joint document with NEDDC but the new strategy would be a Bolsover only document in line with the Council's visions and aims.

The draft Empty Property Strategy 2021-2024 set out the Council's objectives in relation to bringing empty properties in the District back into use. It would enable the Council to implement a raft of measures to reduce the number of long term empty properties resulting in additional housing units, additional New Homes Bonus, increase in council tax income and greater community sustainability which contributed to the delivery of the Council's Growth Strategy.

In November 2019 there were approximately 750 properties in the District which had been empty for more than 6 months. These properties represented a wasted resource and were the main focus of the new empty property strategy.

The strategy tied together the three main strands of Empty Property work: advice, assistance and enforcement, and presented a framework for co-ordinated work in the shape of an Empty Property Action Plan. The strategy would also have a key role in helping to secure potential external funding for housing related projects across the District.

A table in the report showed potential timeframes for the development and implementation of the strategy, however, this may be subject to change due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

A Member noted that as discussed earlier in the meeting, target G11 for 2021-2024 had been halved from 10 to 5 and as the strategic objective of the Strategy was to bring empty properties back in to use, he queried if any consideration had been given to not

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have an empty property strategy given that it was intensive but with limited results. The Joint Housing Strategy & Growth Manager replied that empty properties were a blight on the area and could spread, they were also a magnate for problems such as antisocial behaviour. He added that although the previous target had failed, in excess of 10 units were brought back into use, i.e, 3 houses had been turned into 6 flats.

Moved by Councillor Tom Munro and seconded by Councillor Jen Wilson
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Housing Strategy

Committee was asked to note that the Housing Strategy document would be developed concurrently with the Empty Property Strategy

The Housing Strategy set out the Council's strategic framework to meet the District's housing and housing related support needs.

The previous Housing Strategy was a joint document with Economic Development. Whilst the two departments worked closely together it had been agreed that the strategies should be written as two separate documents.

The Council's vision for housing would steer the Strategy and focus on the Council's key priorities whilst having due regard to local and national policy.

The Strategy formed a plan on how the Council would work with partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors to enable housing growth across all sectors, and the quality and range of housing to meet resident's needs in the District, including housing and support for the most vulnerable. The strategy would also have a key role in helping to secure potential external funding for housing related projects across the District.

A table in the report showed the potential timeframes for the development and implementation of the Strategy, however this may be subject to change due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Consultation would be carried out at various stages throughout the development process with internal and external organisations, including public, private and voluntary sectors.

Moved by Councillor Tom Munro and seconded by Councillor Jen Wilson
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

GRO14-20/21 WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021

Committee considered their Work Programme 2020/21.

A Member requested that a Review of the Lettings of the Bolsover Homes Contract be added to the list of topics for review to be undertaken by the Committee.

Moved by Councillor Tricia Clough and seconded by Councillor Graham Parkin
RESOLVED that the Work Programme 2020/21 be noted.

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GRO15-20/21 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

Moved by Councillor Jen Wilson and seconded by Councillor Tom Munro

RESOLVED that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the stated Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act and it is not in the public interest for that to be revealed.

Recorded Vote: Councillor James Watson abstained from voting on the meeting moving into exempt business and requested that this be recorded in the Minutes.

GRO16-20/21 POST SCRUTINY MONITORING REPORT - REVIEW OF INCOME GENERATION

Committee was asked to note that the Post Scrutiny Monitoring report on the Review of Income Generation was not restricted, however, the verbal update provided by the Assistant Director – Development, contained exempt information which would not be recorded in the Minutes.

Committee considered a report which was their final post-scrutiny monitoring report on the Review of Income Generation. The report was originally scheduled to be presented to the Committee's meeting in March 2020, however, this was cancelled due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

The aim of the review was to consider what had already been done to generate income, what other authorities had done to generate income and to make recommendations on ways for the Authority to generate income.

Committee had made 11 recommendations, which were subsequently agreed by Executive. These recommendations would hopefully assist the Council in identifying new investments and mechanisms for income generation and this report acknowledged progress to date by officers implementing the recommendations.

7 out of the 11 recommendations were complete and 4 were recommended for extension beyond the original target date of March 2020. These 4 recommendations were dependent on the completion of additional work being undertaken.

Moved and seconded

RESOLVED that (1) progress against the review recommendations be noted,

(3) an extension beyond the original target date of March 2020 for the 4 recommendations as identified in Appendix 2 be agreed,

(4) the findings of the Review be made public in accordance with Part 4.5.17(3) of the Council's Constitution,

(5) a further update against progress to keep Members informed of

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Transformation developments linked to Income Generation and to allow for full implementation of the 4 recommendations identified for extension be submitted to Committee in twelve months' time.

(Scrutiny & Elections Officer)

The meeting concluded at 1120 hours.