

Growth and Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday 21 November 2012

PRESENT:

Councillor Nicholson, in the Chair.

Councillor Mrs Nelder, Vice Chair.

Councillors Mrs Aspinall, Damarell, Darcy, Fox, Martin Leaves, John Smith, Wheeler and Wigans.

Apologies for absence: Councillor Michael Leaves.

Also in attendance: Councillor Evans, Leader of the Council, Tim Jones, Chair of the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Chris Grace, Head of Economy, Enterprise and Partnership, Mark Looker, Worklessness Co-ordinator, Councillor Vincent, Cabinet Member for Environment, Paul Barnard, Assistant Director for Planning, Sue Eden, Lead Officer (substitute for Gill Peele) and Ross Johnston, Democratic Support Officer.

The meeting started at 3.00 pm and finished at 5.30 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

37. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by Councillors in accordance with the code of conduct.

38. **MINUTES**

Agreed to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2012.

39. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

40. **TRACKING RESOLUTIONS AND FEEDBACK FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

The Chair informed the panel that the un-shaded item (19/09/12 – 26) on the tracking resolution schedule had now been completed and would therefore be greyed out, ready to be removed along with all other completed items.

41. **UPDATE ON GOVERNMENT POLICY CHANGES**

There were no new government policy updates provided.

42. HEART OF THE SOUTH WEST LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP

Councillor Evans, Leader of the Council, Tim Jones, Chair of the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), and Chris Grace, Head of Economy, Enterprise and Partnership, presented a report and provided an update on the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership.

Members were informed that –

- (a) the LEP had capitalised on existing competitiveness funding, where approximately £8m had been ring-fenced for Plymouth through the urban Enterprise programme;
- (b) the LEP was awarded £21.5 as part of the Growing Places Fund, a new funding initiative to assist stalled projects in the region, in Plymouth the Millfields and Ocean Studios had bid for funding;
- (c) Plymouth had been successful in receiving funding from the Pinchpoint Fund, a highways related fund, with this money being spent on highways improvements on the A38 Manadon slip road;
- (d) the LEP and Council were working closely with Finetubes, a company operating in Plymouth that were recently taken over by Watermark, an American Venture Capital Company, to ensure that investment was delivered locally by providing local investment opportunities and setting up dialogue sessions with other major regional businesses including EDF Energy;
- (e) a locally based funding source was being looked at to provide funding for local small businesses;
- (f) Plymouth had been invited into the second round of bidding for a City Deal, a new programme designed to enable economic growth through greater financial and legislative freedoms, and it was hoped if successful the programme would enable Plymouth to assist the Government in delivering growth in Plymouth and the surrounding areas.

Following members questions it was reported that –

- (g) Cornwall's LEP and Cornwall Council had been fully consulted on the City Deal and were both engaged in the process;
- (h) the idea of operating a 'Plymouth Bank' or something similar was being discussed as part the City Deal;
- (i) Local Transport Boards were being created by the Government to deliver better value for money on local highways and transport issues;
- (j) the LEP were approaching local investment from the perspective that inward investment was probably not achievable in the current economic situation and instead there was a focus on re-investment from existing companies;
- (k) building relations with investors and improving confidence with existing regionally operating companies was vital for local economic growth and key to achieving this was to demonstrate the qualities on offer in the region and to improve on productivity levels through investment in local connectivity such as broadband;
- (l) the LEP and Plymouth City Council were keen on increasing signage referring to Plymouth on motorways throughout the South West.

The Chair thanked Tim Jones, Councillor Evans and Chris Grace for their attendance.

Recommended to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board that Plymouth City Council continues to work with the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, as well as other partners within its sub-region, in the interests of the city around major strategic issues such as City Deals and transportation, and in order to support local businesses accessing LEP influenced or controlled funding streams.

Agreed –

- (1) that the answers to the questions posed by the panel are noted;
- (2) to invite Tim Jones and the then appointed Chief Executive of the LEP to attend the panel's meeting in May 2013 to provide an update and review progress since November 2012.

43. **YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT UPDATE**

Mark Looker, Worklessness Co-ordinator, provided the panel with an update on Youth Unemployment.

The panel were informed that the report submitted demonstrated how the Council had responded to the recommendations of the Growth and Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Panel Task and Finish Group to review the issue of youth unemployment in Plymouth.

The Chair commented that Cabinet's responses to the recommendations were welcomed, particularly the appointment of Councillor Damarell as the City's champion for youth unemployment.

In response to members questions it was reported that –

- (a) the Economic Development department were working closely with local job agencies in an attempt to address the issue of companies not targeting or employing young people;
- (b) this issue was also being addressed through the department encouraging employers to attend education and training settings to ensure young people develop the skills and knowledge required to make them ready for employment;
- (c) the department was also targeting major companies, following submission of planning applications to engage them in dialogue with local job agencies at an early stage;
- (d) the Economic Development restructure had been agreed and was now being implemented and it was expected that all posts would be filled early in 2013.

The Chair thanked Mark Looker for his attendance.

44. **MARKET RECOVERY SCHEME**

Councillor Vincent, Cabinet Member for Environment and Paul Barnard, Assistant Director for Planning presented a briefing report on the Market Recovery Scheme (MRS).

In response to questions members were informed that –

- (a) when the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was adopted, which was likely to be in the summer of 2013, this would replace most Section 106 obligations which would mean that the MRS would be no longer necessary or legally possible;

- (b) the MRS, which was adopted in January 2009, had played a successful role in maintaining the momentum of regeneration in the City and its ambitious growth agenda, with the Planning Committee often applying the MRS thoughtfully and carefully on many applications;
- (c) in total 64 permissions had been granted using the MRS since 2009; at present 20 developments had been completed with a further 10 in a construction phase;
- (d) the Planning Committee was duty bound to consider all applications received and any applicant could instigate the MRS by submitting an “open-book” detailed viability assessment, this was often determined at the pre-application stage and given the recent changes to the constitution there were now more provisions to engage with ward councillors at this stage of the planning process;
- (e) the MRS was created with two main types of incentive, these were –
 - to create measures to encourage the early delivery of projects during the current economic downturn, this was aided by offering financial discounts on contributions by ensuring that developers made a substantial start on the development within two years of granted consent;
 - to assist developers in responding quickly to economic recovery by ensuring there were ‘oven ready’ consents; this was ensured by extending the periods of planning permission to up to seven years;
- (f) any developer wishing to construct in Plymouth needed to form a view and adopt an approach that fell in line with the policies Plymouth operated with at present and that included ensuring any major housing developments met the affordable housing requirements.

45. **GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS TO CHANGE THE PLANNING SYSTEM**

Councillor Vincent, Cabinet Member for Environment and Paul Barnard, Assistant Director for Planning gave a verbal update on the government proposals to change the planning system. Members were informed that –

- (a) the Government announced changes to permitted development rights on 6 September 2012 and have subsequently released a consultation document on the proposed changes to extending permitted development right for homeowners and businesses;
- (b) the Government had proposed action on five key areas, all in non-protected areas and for a period of three years, unless otherwise stated, the proposals included –
 - to increase the size limits for the depth of single-storey domestic extensions from 4m to 8m (for detached houses) and from 3m to 6m (all other houses);
 - to increase the size limits for extensions to shop and professional services establishments;
 - to increase the size limits for extensions to offices;
 - to increase the size limits for new industrial buildings;
 - to remove some prior approval requirements for the installation of broadband

infrastructure for a period of five years;

- (c) the Government were also keen to explore whether there was scope to use permitted development rights to make it easier to carry out garage conversions;
- (d) other changes to permitted development rights that were being amended separately included converting commercial properties to residential use.

In response to members questions it was reported that –

- (e) the consultation was scheduled to end on 24 December 2012 and the Government had indicated that the proposals if implemented would be taken forward quickly after the consultation period ends;
- (f) commercial properties could be converted to residential use, but this was subject to the building not requiring any exterior alterations;
- (g) permitted development rights only covered aspects relating to the need for planning permission and did not reduce the requirements (according to the Government) on developers under any other regulatory regimes, including building regulations;
- (h) other legislation proposed had further impacts on the planning department and democratic processes such as the changes to the modification or discharge of affordable housing requirements secured through Section 106 agreements, as proposed as part of the Growth and Infrastructure Bill;
- (i) the Cabinet, at a meeting on 11 September 2012 following the announcement of Government proposals to change permitted development rights, requested that the Planning Committee look at the Government proposals when published in greater detail, consider its implications for the City and report back to Cabinet on options.

Members commented that –

- (j) they were concerned with buildings being converted from commercial properties into residential use as it was felt that this could have serious unintended consequences on the economic productivity of some local areas;
- (k) the proposals contained in the Growth and Infrastructure Bill in relation to affordable housing provision was a major concern and a serious city-wide issue.

Members recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel recommend that the Customer and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel review the impact of Clause 5, modification or discharge of affordable housing requirements secured through Section 106 agreements, in the Growth and Infrastructure Bill, to determine the impact this clause may have on local communities as a result of applicants applying to the local authority for modifications to or the removal of agreed S106 agreements with respect to affordable housing. Where an authority fails to make a determination within the specified time or determines that no modification will be made, the applicant may appeal to the Planning Inspectorate.

Agreed that a request is made to the Planning Committee asking for the draft response to the Government consultation paper to be shared with members of the Growth and Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Panel, who would then identify any comments or concerns they had by responding directly to Paul Barnard for consideration in the final consultation response prior to its submission to Government.

46. **RESIDENTIAL SITES WITH OUTSTANDING BUILDS**

Paul Barnard, Assistant Director for Planning presented a list of sites with lapsed or unimplemented planning consents for residential development. Members were informed that the submitted list was the most up to date available and dated from 1 April 2012. A new list would be created in April 2013 as part of annual monitoring arrangements undertaken by the Planning department.

Councillor Nicholson, Chair, informed the panel that if any member wished to discuss any individual planning application or any particular site they needed to request that information from the Planning department.

Paul Barnard was thanked for his attendance.

47. **COMMUNITY EVENTS AND ROAD CLOSURES**

Councillor Nicholson, Chair, informed the panel that following a recent meeting with Councillor Coker, Cabinet Member for Transport and Clive Perkin, Assistant Director for Transport it was decided that an Executive Decision would be taken identifying a list of historic events with which road closures would be funded by the Council. This list would be subject to a review in 12 months and the responsibility of this would now be positioned with Economic Development.

48. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The panel discussed its work programme for 2012 – 2013.

Recommended to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board that –

- (1) Anthony Payne, Director for Place, is invited to provide a departmental update in February;
- (2) Government updates is to be removed from February;
- (3) Commercial Asset Strategy is to be deferred until the next municipal year;
- (4) Welfare Reform is to be deferred until the next municipal year;
- (5) the Evaluation of Gdynia Way is to be scheduled for February;
- (6) Road Safety Awareness is to be schedule for May;
- (7) On Street Trading item is to be removed from work programme;
- (8) the Market Recovery Scheme item has now been completed and is to be removed from February;
- (9) all items above the Bi-Annual Scrutiny report and below Government proposals on Planning Systems are to be deleted;
- (10) the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership is to be scheduled for May 2013.

49. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.