



<u>Committee and Date</u>
Development Services Scrutiny Committee
26 January 2010

<u>Item</u>
3A
Public

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26 NOVEMBER 2009

7.00 pm to 9.30 pm

Responsible Officer Martin Stevens

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Present: Mrs J Barrow, Mrs K Burgoyne, Mr S Davenport, Mr D W Evans, Mr C J Lea and Mr A N Mosley (Chairman)

Mr M Price and Mr D Roberts attended in their capacity as portfolio holders.

1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Mr T Bebb, Mr G Davies, Mr T Davies, Mrs P Dee, Mr E J Everall, Mr W Parr and Mr S J West.

Mrs J B Barrow substituted for Mr S J West. Mrs K Burgoyne substituted for Mr T Davies.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

4. Member Question Time

There were no Member questions.

5. Shrewsbury Growth Point, Northern Corridor Delivery Plan, Ditherington Flax Mill and Shrewsbury Vision

- 5.1 The Head of Shrewsbury Growth Point from Shropshire Council gave a presentation. He stated that the Growth Point initiative had been designed to provide support to local communities who wanted to pursue large scale and sustainable growth, including new housing, through partnership with government. As part of the Growth Point scheme there was an aim to deliver approximately 3,500 additional dwellings by 2016 including 100 affordable houses per annum. Growth Point projects aimed to improve employment opportunities and the quality of life in Shrewsbury including new and sustainable infrastructure connecting Shrewsbury to the wider region. Regeneration in the Northern Corridor was planned with potential to provide up to 600 new homes and new employment land. Sites at the Flax Mill,

Spring Gardens, land to the West of Ellesmere Road, land at Arlington Way, and land at Harlescott were all potential sites for new housing development. It was anticipated that a planning application for development at the Flax Mill would be submitted in the Summer of 2010.

- 5.2 The Head of Shrewsbury Growth Point gave a brief outline of the Shrewsbury Vision Project. The aim of the Shrewsbury Vision was to provide a comprehensive plan that identified regeneration opportunities within the town and integrated with the Local Development Framework (LDF), Community Strategy and Cultural Strategy. The Shrewsbury Vision would provide a business plan, a delivery plan and a spatial plan for the town.
- 5.3 A member of the public asked about traffic congestion in Shrewsbury and how the extra development planned would impact on traffic levels. In response the Assistant Director for Strategy and Development stated that the Council recognised the problem of congestion and referred to the North West Relief Road project which was intended to take traffic out of the town. The Council was continuing to look at ways to increase public transport. The only alternative to development in the town would be to allow the town to expand further into greenfield sites.
- 5.4 A member of the public asked about the development planned at the land to the West of Ellesmere Road and expressed concern that there would be insufficient infrastructure to support the people in their new homes. In response the Assistant Director for Strategy and Development stated that the key was to prepare a development plan which would involve talking to all the statutory providers such as Education and Social Services. However there were limits as to what infrastructure the Council could put in place before development of housing as the funding was limited.
- 5.5 A member of the public stated that it was important that the road network was fit for purpose whenever there was development. They referred to the mini island which they considered not to be aligned properly by the new sports centre.
- 5.6 Mr Malcolm Price speaking in his capacity of Portfolio Holder stated that there was a housing need with over 800 people on the waiting list. He stated that the figures showing the number of houses that were empty over the last six months would be released soon, which he considered to be staggering.
- 5.7 A member of the public stated that there was little to encourage cyclists in the town of Shrewsbury. In response the Council's promotion manager for Cycle Shrewsbury stated that the Council was trying to improve the cycle network in Shrewsbury and there was 18 months left of funding. She asked people to contact her with any concerns or suggestions.
- 5.8 A member of the public referred to the height of the new development at Ellesmere Grange, which was five storey's high. They expressed concern that this adversely affected the landscape of the area and hoped that consideration in future would be given to the height of buildings. In response, The Head of Shrewsbury Growth Point stated that the land at Ellesmere

Grange was on a flood plain and so it had been necessary to raise the ground level.

- 5.9 The Chairman stated that the Flax Mill was a very important part of the development plans for Shrewsbury. The Assistant Director for Strategy and Development stated that the Flax Mill was a catalyst of ambition for how Shropshire should progress in the future. He stated that English Heritage now owned the Flax Mill. The former Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council had taken out a compulsory purchase order on the privately owned land which was required for the Flax Mill development project. Design work was currently being undertaken by Fielden Clegg Bradley Studios on behalf of the Council and English Heritage and would be available in December 2009 following completion of phase one of their design contract. Public funding was required to complete the Flax Mill scheme, which was estimated to be in the region of between nine and sixteen million pounds. The scheme could not be completely funded by private finance because of the high cost of restoring, conserving and re-using the listed buildings and the abnormal site costs. Funding sources potentially included the Heritage Lottery Fund, European funding and Advantage West Midlands.
- 5.10 The Assistant Director for Strategy and Development introduced Mr Tim Greensmith who then gave a presentation on the Flax Mill development plans. Mr Greensmith stated that he had been involved with the project since 2004. He was five months into a design study. He stated that access to the Flax Mill site was a very important consideration. A new road was proposed which would make the mini-island safe. The canal could also be reinterpreted. Sustainability measures were being considered for the development including making use of bio-mass technology, ground source heat pumps and solar panels. There were currently a number of specialists at the site which included, archaeologists, ecologists, acoustic specialists, flood risk evaluators, and utility specialists.
- 5.11 Mr Greensmith stated that the Flax Mill was the oldest cast iron framework building in the world and at the time of its construction the engineering was cutting edge. It was a very delicate structure, grade one listed, and thus required state of the art engineering to upgrade the structure. By the end of December investigative works would be concluded. A planning application would be submitted in May 2010 and the final design work completed by the end of 2010. The year 2012 was a possibility for occupancy to be taken up.
- 5.12 The Assistant Director for Strategy and Development introduced Mr Chris Smith from English Heritage. Mr Smith stated that if the Flax Mill had been purchased forty years ago by English Heritage it would have been treated as a great monument but now the state was unlikely to buy something merely for it to become a monument. English Heritage now purchased sites with the intention for them to be used. English Heritage in the last four years had been working in partnership to find a viable use for the Flax Mill site.
- 5.13 A member of the public asked if there had been any liaison with Halifax as he understood they had been involved with the regeneration of historical buildings in the past. In response Mr Smith stated that he was aware of the

work Halifax had done in the past but didn't think it was suitable for the Flax Mill due to its uniqueness.

- 5.14 A member of the public asked about the amount of public access that was intended for the Flax Mill site. The Assistant Director for Strategy and Development stated that he didn't want the site to be completely closed to the public. The restored canal was very important and whilst he could not confirm the use of the buildings it was possible that the Council would use some of the space.
- 5.15 A member of the public stated that the canal in Ditherington was filled with surplus emissions. In response Mr Smith stated that risk assessments were being undertaken for all aspects of the project.
- 5.16 A member of the public stated that projects had been proposed for the Flax Mill in the past and none of them had come to fruition. He was skeptical as to whether the latest plans would be completed and wondered why funding had not been secured before the design work was completed. In response the Assistant Director for Strategy and Development stated that it was necessary to complete design work in order to be able to source funding. Mr Smith stated that the buildings were no longer at risk after work by English Heritage.
- 5.17 The Chairman stated that it was vital that the project should go ahead and all interested parties should do all they could to help the project be completion. He stated that he had been on a steering group for eighteen months and had been impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of all the people in the group. He described it as a defining project for the new Council.
- 5.18 A Member of the Council in attendance asked about the likelihood of securing funding for the Flax Mill project and about the potential interest of the Council's Property Services utilising the site. In response the Assistant Director for Strategy and Development stated that Heritage Lottery Funding was more difficult to obtain than in the past and they would probably attach certain conditions to the funding, such as only allowing money to be spent in parts that would be accessible to the general public. The chances of obtaining European Funding were more positive than they had been two months ago and there was probably a 50% chance. Advantage West Midlands sadly had a drastically reduced budget. The Council could also potentially put some money in to bridge the funding gap and it was hoped that English Heritage would also be able to add some more money to the project.
- 5.19 A Member of the Council in attendance stated that the Council owned many buildings across the county and potentially money could be raised from them being sold. It was important to find the funding for the project and there was always potential for profit from the new site.
- 5.20 A member of the public enquired as to when the bus station would be relocated. The Head of Shrewsbury Growth Point stated that the Council was currently in discussions with Arriva and they were looking at the logistics of two potential sites.

5.21 A member of the public raised the importance of the canal network and hoped that one day there would be a link with Ironbridge.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Committee:-

- A) Supports the projects outlined in the report;
- B) Notes the progress to date of the Shrewsbury Growth Point activities;
- C) Recommend to Cabinet that the Shrewsbury Vision work should proceed as outlined in the report.

6.0 Shrewsbury Vision – Original Cabinet Report (Call-in)

- 6.1 The Chairman explained that he had called-in, Cabinet’s decision to spend up to £120,000 on a regeneration framework for Shrewsbury. This was not because he did not want to see regeneration in Shrewsbury but because he was concerned about how the money would be spent and if it would deliver value for money.
- 6.2 Mr Malcolm Price speaking in his capacity as Portfolio Holder stated that the Council was fortunate enough to obtain Growth Point Funding. He asked the Scrutiny Committee to endorse the recommendation of Cabinet to commission a regeneration framework for Shrewsbury to be funded via the Growth Point budget up to a maximum of £120,000.
- 6.2 The Chairman asked Officers to explain how the money, up to £120,000, would be spent. The Head of Shrewsbury Growth Point stated it was proposed to utilise the Homes and Communities Agency’s (HCA) Consultants Panel for Masterplanning and procuring a consultancy through restricted tender.
- 6.3 A number of Members of the Council spoke in support of the proposed work and stated the benefits of previous consultancy work in the town.

RESOLVED:

- A) That the Scrutiny Committee has considered the call-in and after due consideration recommend to Cabinet that the Shrewsbury Vision work should proceed as outlined in the report.
- B) That a report on the progress of Shrewsbury Growth Point is received by the Scrutiny Committee in a year’s time.

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....