

MINUTES of a meeting of the COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 9 FEBRUARY 2022

Present: Councillor J Houtt (Chairman)

Councillors R L Morris, C C Benfield, T Eynon, J Geary, L A Gillard (Substitute for Councillor A J Bridgen), M D Hay, G Houtt, J G Simmons and M B Wyatt

In Attendance: Councillors R Johnson

Portfolio Holders: Councillors

Officers: Mr J Arnold, Mrs C Hammond, Mrs R Wallace, Miss E Warhurst, Mr P Bailey, Mr D Bates, Mr C Elston, Mr M Murphy, Ms C Proudfoot, Mrs M Scott and Mr B Walford

**24. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor A Bridgen.

**25. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were no interests declared.

**26. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

There were no questions received.

**27. MINUTES**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2021.

Following concerns raised by Councillor J Geary over giving scrutiny items a time limit, the Monitoring Officer reminded members that Council meetings were limited to three hours unless members agreed to extend to a further 30 minutes, but timing set out for each item was there as a guide to help manage the meeting.

It was moved by Councillor J Geary, seconded by Councillor R Morris and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2021 be approved as a correct record.

**28. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION IN THE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair referred to the Committee's work programme and invited Members to make requests for any additional items.

By affirmation of the meeting, it was

RESOLVED THAT:-

The Committee's future work programme be noted.

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## 29. FLOOD MANAGEMENT IN NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE

The Head of Planning and Infrastructure and The Head of HR and Organisational Development presented the report to members.

Members expressed concerns that a private sector body such as Severn Trent was acting as a key advisor and felt that they did not have the district's best interests at heart. They were uncomfortable that Severn Trent were just getting away with doing what they needed to and agreed that the Council should demand more action and hold them to account.

A member asked for further information on the actual cost of flooding in the District, which would help to inform the Council's climate action plan.

Members noted the Hugglescote flooding issues and felt that Severn Trent should complete the improvement scheme to the sewage system before any further development took place, as the capacity was not great enough to cope.

A member was pleased to see that the report acknowledged that local knowledge on poor drainage had not been taken into account when approving the development at Measham Road, Moira, as flooding continued to effect the surrounding area.

The Head of Planning and Infrastructure advised members that Severn Trent were a statutory consultee in relation to planning applications, rather than a key advisor and that planning conditions were applied to ensure suitable sewage connection before homes were lived in. In terms of paragraphs 5.4 and 5.5, he was happy to go back to Severn Trent to seek further information and clarification on the works detailed in the report. He stated that he would be happy to speak to members on individual cases and that he would give thought and seek advice to the potential implications, in terms of sewage connection, on any further development in the Hugglescote area.

A member asked for further information on the actual cost of flooding in the District, which would help to inform the Council's climate action plan.

The Head of HR and Organisational Development advised that he was not aware of any wider financial information in respect of flooding as it would centre around insurance claims from individuals. He noted that much of the flooding prevention work that had been completed by householders under the government grant scheme had involved further additional costs in excess of the £5,000 grant cap. He undertook to investigate this further and to respond to the member's question.

Some members noted that parishes in their areas had not got Community resilience plans in place and asked if these parishes had been contacted about devising plans. The Head of HR and Organisational Development outlined that work that had been carried out on Community plans and advised that officers would be reviving the work on the plans would make contact, as a priority, again with those parishes to offer assistance with planning their process.

It was moved by Councillor J Geary, seconded by Councillor R Morris and

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The report on Flood Management in North West Leicestershire be considered and the comments noted above.
2. The intention to bring an annual district Flood Management report, to include an update on Partnership working within our communities be noted.

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3. Note the introduction of the new county wide flood reporting system by Leicestershire County Council be noted.

### **30. EMPTY HOMES POLICY**

The Environmental Protection Team Manager presented the report to members.

In response to a question from a member, the Environmental Protection Team Manager advised that she did not have the figure to hand on the properties that had been brought back to use, but she would endeavour to get the information from Council Tax if she was able to outside of the meeting. It was requested that the figures be included in the minutes.

A member sought clarification on whether the Long Term Empty Property Premium could be shortened from 3 years to 2 years as he felt 3 years was too long. He supported the Council Tax increase from 100% to 200% for long term empty properties. The Environmental Protection Team Manager advised that the discounted period was not set by the Environmental Protection Team, but she would feed back the comments to Council Tax and seek clarity as to who was responsible for setting the time length

It was felt that a timeline of when properties became empty rather than a pinpoint figure should have been included in the report and at what point intervention came in to get the figure down, so that tracking could be carried out to review what action worked.

In response to comments from a member, the Environmental Protection Team Manager advised that a benchmarking study could be carried out but noted that districts would have different challenges as to why homes were not being brought back in to use and in terms of incentive schemes, it was noted that there had been various schemes and grants across the years to support repairs but most of which had now ended. She stated that the service could revisit a Council run grant scheme to help get homes in use again.

Members were thanked for their contributions which would be considered and feed into the report before being presented to Cabinet on 29 March.

*Post Meeting Note:-*

*The Environmental Protection Team Manager is waiting for confirmation from the Revenues and Benefits Team on the number of Empty Properties brought back into use last year. However, the New Homes Bonus generated from this for 2021 was £2,452,094.*

### **31. NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH PLAN**

The Economic Development and Regeneration Team Manager presented the report to members.

Members noted that following the figures detailed in the report, there appeared to be far more wealth growth for employers than there was job growth for residents of the district, which was not sustainable and that to mitigate the growth a more veracious climate action plan was needed.

A member noted the important work that the Business Focus team did but felt that there was more work needed on the plan. She noted the inequality disparity in the area, the why jobs in the area were car dependent and work need to be done around the lack of rail connection and other public transport that would join up the small towns. She raised concerns over the lack of educational courses that were available in the area to help

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residents further their learning that, in turn, would help them apply for the jobs that were available in the district.

In response to the comments made by members, the Economic Development and Regeneration Team Manager noted that Coalville remained a big part of the work and the Council would continue to support the small businesses. In terms of job growth, he noted that the District was one of the biggest job growth areas in the region, but work would continue on supporting the creation of new jobs and supporting residents to get in them. He advised that more work could be done around climate challenges and they could look to engage with developers about the efficiencies of their buildings from the outset and then work with existing employers to see how they could improve the efficiency of their sites and premises. He noted that there was inequality in terms of those who could access jobs. Work needs to continue in relation to supporting physical access to jobs, in terms of transport.

In addition the Council will continue to work with employers to adopt flexible recruitment/operational practices to make roles more accessible for those with disabilities. He advised that Rail connections would be kept within the growth plan and did not get lost amongst other projects.

Members were thanked for their contributions which would be considered and feed into the report before being presented to Cabinet in March.

## **32. MARLBOROUGH SQUARE PUBLIC REALM**

The Head of Property and Regeneration presented the report to members, updating on the progress of the project. He drew members' attention to the additional paper that had been provided, which updated the report and recommendations, following the conclusion of the tender process. He then handed over to the Head of Finance to update members on the business case.

Some members expressed concerns over the new plans, stating that they supported the original plans to provide a public space of the highest order, would provide a pedestrianised square where a market and outdoor events could be held. However, the new plans now included a pedestrian platform with traffic travelling either side of it, and that the pedestrian area would only be so between certain hours. Some members felt that the pedestrian area should be extended out to the northern side of the square using a gated system to stop traffic from accessing it, except for deliveries to businesses. Concerns were also expressed over the cost of the materials that were to be used as it was felt that they were expensive and there would be additional costs for repair and maintenance.

Members acknowledged the need to rejuvenate the Town Centre and see it thrive again and the project would provide an attractive place for residents to come and visit. Some members acknowledged the work that officers had put in to make the project work after all the stumbling blocks that it had hit.

A member felt that they could not support part D of recommendation 3 to Cabinet, as officers at the County Highways Authority had put a lot of work into the project and she felt uncomfortable about negotiating a reduction in fees because of this.

The Head of Property and Regeneration advised that in relation to the highways fees, any work that had been carried out by the highways officers when they were first involved had been paid for, along with the S278 process. The fees that it was proposed to be negotiated related to the ongoing inspection fees, as LCC were applying the commercial rate rather than the authority to authority rate.

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A member touched on the cost as, should the project become a cost to the Council, residents who lived outside the Coalville area may feel that they would be subsidising a Coalville project with their Council Tax. He asked the Head of Finance to expand on how the costings would look in 10 years and to provide a summary on inflation.

The Head of Finance explained to members how minimum revenue provision would work and in terms of inflation, it was hoped the income would inflate in time, but the initial cost would not inflate as the MRP would be a fixed amount. He noted that the interest to be paid on the borrowing would not be fixed and that the £61k figure was the difference between the income for selling the stalls against the cleaning and repairs to them.

A member sought clarity that possible additional income for festivals and various large-scale events which could be held on the square, had been considered in the figures put forward, which would be over and beyond the income of the market, but felt however, that the plans before members had diluted the possibility of those types of events.

The Head of Property and Regeneration advised that the figures that had been given were for the standard outdoor market and that the scheme before them had been designed to hold further events. He added that the material that had been proposed would have the capability to take heavier loads such as fairground rides. Therefore, the income from ad-hoc events would be a bonus on top of the outdoor market income.

The Strategic Director thanked members for their comments. He noted that officers had worked to maximise the functionality of the square for markets and public use despite the significant constraints and access requirements. The north side access would be paved in granite and flush and designed not to be seen as a road and would provide an extension to the central space that could be used. Officers had wrestled with how to deal with the access requirements yet make it form part of the square and put controls in place. Officers would reflect further on the comments made in respect of making it more pedestrian. He stated that the scheme in front of members could be delivered with all the costings and timelines in place, which included materials that would stand the test of time.

The Head of Economic Regeneration advised members that it was planned for the work to start after Easter, with a proposed completion date by the end of the current year, subject to no delays.

The amended recommendations set out in the additional papers were moved by Councillor R Morris, seconded by Councillor G Houlton and

RESOLVED THAT:-

- 1) The update on the redevelopment of Marlborough square as a public realm place be considered and the comments noted above.
- 2) Subject to the above and the outcome of the tender exercise, the following recommendations to Cabinet be supported:

THAT CABINET:

1. Recommend to Council, at its meeting on 24 February 2022, that the additional funds required to implement the Marlborough square public realm project be found from the Coalville regeneration framework budget line being proposed in the 2022/23 Council budget.

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2. Subject to approval by Council on 24 February 2022, based on the outcome of the tender exercise and the estimated other project costs set out in the report, agrees to proceed to award the construction contract and implement the project.
3. Delegates authority to the Strategic Director (place) to:
  - A) Enter into those highways agreements necessary to deliver the public realm project;
  - B) Agree the terms of the construction contract; and
  - C) Complete such other agreements as shall be necessary to implement the project within the approved budget.
  - D) Seek to negotiate a reduction or waiver of the Highways Authority fees and commuted lump sum proposed to be charged by Leicestershire County Council

### **33. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCRUTINY CROSS PARTY WORKING GROUP - SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMMING**

The Strategic Director presented the report to members.

In response to questions from members, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that the work programming group would be made up from members of each political party and advised that members of the scrutiny committees would still be able to put items forward to be scrutinised and that the work programming group would then consider such requests to include into the committees' work plans along with regular items and reports from officers.

It was moved by Councillor T Eynon, seconded by Councillor C Benfield and

RESOLVED THAT:-

- 1) The proposal of the Scrutiny Cross Party Working Group, as set out in paragraph 2 of the report, be endorsed.
- 2) Authority be delegated to the Director of Place and the Director of Housing and Customer Services to enable establishment of the group; to include contact with the whips to agree its membership in accordance with paragraph 3.1.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.29 pm

Chairman's initials