

## **EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2017**

### **1. Middlesbrough Housing Strategy 2017-20**

Following public consultation, the Middlesbrough Housing Strategy was adopted 22 November 2017.

The strategy aims to deliver investment in new and existing homes and neighbourhoods in order to meet the diverse needs and aspirations of our communities, help people live healthier and happier lives, drive and support economic growth and mitigate public service challenges and costs. As such, it will play a major role in helping to deliver the Mayor's 2025 Vision of a Middlesbrough where people want to live, with fair access to high quality homes for all. It is also central to the town's Investment Strategy and will support the ambition of the Tees Valley Strategic Economic Plan, to accelerate the supply of good quality homes across the whole housing market. The strategy has three key objectives:

- meet the housing needs and aspirations of a growing population;
- improve the life opportunities of residents in areas of poor quality housing and deprivation; and,
- address the pressures of an ageing population and support vulnerable people to live independent lives for as long as possible

The adopted strategy, which will now be added to the Council's website, provides more detail on each of the objectives along with associated priorities and actions.

### **2. DCLG Housing Paper**

Whilst we have ambitious plans for housing growth, the Government's position is confused at best – and this is highlighted in the release of its latest housing growth targets.

On 14 September 2017 the Government launched a consultation entitled 'Planning for the right homes in the right places', which sets out a number of proposals to reform the planning system. Of critical importance to the Council is the proposal to introduce a standard methodology for calculating housing need. The proposed approach would result in figure of 267 dwellings per annum, a significant reduction below our own target of 410 and the emerging figure of 425.

This methodology is fundamentally flawed due to its reliance on past trends, reflecting a period when Middlesbrough's housing delivery was significantly affected by the housing clearance programme (resulting in net losses to the stock), the recession, and Government cuts including the cancellation of funding for housing regeneration programmes. In recent times however, Middlesbrough has worked hard to turn things around, seeing significant increases in housebuilding – averaging over 590 homes per year over – to support economic growth over the last 3 years, with values that are

now outperforming other traditionally strong parts of the Tees Valley. These higher levels of housebuilding have are largely ignored in the Government's methodology.

It is essential to maintain strong levels of housebuilding if we are to realise our economic growth ambitions and transform Middlesbrough's economy, as set out in our Investment Prospectus. The Government figures do not take our ambitions into account, instead preferring to perpetuate low levels of growth and talk Middlesbrough down. The Government's new approach should be seen as a significant risk, both to the Council's plans and also in meeting the needs of our community. We have submitted an objection to this proposal.

The consultation also addresses a number of other issues, including: working in collaboration with other local authorities; assessing viability of developments; neighbourhood planning; and planning application fees.

### **3. Grenfell Tower – Task and Finish Group**

Work to inspect and gather safety information on high rise buildings in Middlesbrough continues. A general survey of all high rise buildings is now complete, and we are looking at collecting safety information for all residential buildings on this list in the first instance. The safety of Middlesbrough residents is paramount and we will continue to work with our partners – Thirteen, Cleveland Fire Brigade, and others – to ensure their homes and places of work are safe. A further update will come to Council early in 2018.

### **4. Planning Update**

A number of housing sites across the borough continue to be getting either built out or are within the planning system and are moving forwards positively. There are a number of pre-application discussions ongoing between housing developers and officers for a number of major housing sites which seek to provide a wide range of house types and therefore offer. These sites include the redevelopment of the cleared site at Bishopton Road and a site at Rowarth Road. Discussions for both of these sites has been focussed on achieving an appropriate level of development which includes a mix of bungalows as well as housing and a keen focus on 'designing out crime' which has seen the involvement and support of the Police Architectural Liaison Officer. The intention of this focus is about removing awkward areas within sites which may attract anti-social behaviour or crime such as rear parking courts, too many pedestrian or vehicular routes through a site and 'defensible space' to front gardens by way of defining appropriate decorative boundary treatments to limit trespass. Applications for these two sites is anticipated in the New Year.

Applications are currently being considered for works to convert the currently vacant 'Kalinka' building opposite the train station. This development would result in the renovation and re-use of one of Middlesbrough's listed buildings and see it provided with a new lease of life for the foreseeable future which, given its location in the historic area around the station, is considered to be an important and positive step.

Officers have met with the University in relation to their long term masterplan for the continued development of the Campus. A number of new building proposals are likely to come forward in 2018 and beyond which the council's planning team and committee will play a part in considering. As part of this masterplan, an application has been received w/c 20/11/2017 for the refurbishment and extension of the Business School to the rear of the Waterhouse Building. The works will modernise

the building and add a vibrant new entrance atrium whilst redefining the pedestrian experience when passing through the campus.

## **5. Grant Funding available for Refurbishment and Rent Scheme**

Empty property owners are being urged to access funding to help bring homes back into use. Under the Refurb & Rent Scheme Middlesbrough Council is aiming to back into use properties which have been empty for more than six months. The scheme will help to address housing need in the town, while ensuring rental income for the landlord.

Up to £16,000 of match incentive (50/50) grant funding is available per property for renovations, with the owner in return required to lease the property to a management organisation for a five-year term. The owner will receive 87% of all rental income collected. The scheme is open to owners of properties that have been vacant for six months or more, and once work needed to bring the property to a 'decent' standard has been identified, the owner is free to source their own contractors.

Once all the work has been completed, the refurbished property will then be leased for five years through a management organisation.

The landlord will remain liable for the cost of ongoing repairs and maintenance, and for Council Tax and utilities during void periods.

To date the Council has received 16 complete applications, with up to 7 of these due to start on site before the year end.

## **6. Road Safety Campaigns**

*Winter Driving Event* – The annual winter driving event took place at Coulby Newham Fire Station on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> November, working in partnership with Cleveland Fire Brigade we secured the free services of National Tyres and Middlesbrough Tyre & Auto Centres to provide mechanics who offered free 5 point safety checks: tyre pressure/tread depth, fluid levels, lights and wiper blades. Drivers will also receive a courtesy windscreen washer bottle top up and Middlesbrough Council Road Safety will be offering drivers mobile phone blockers, these handy pouches block all mobile signals while keeping the phone switched on so that drivers are not distracted during their journey.

*Virtual Reality Goggles* – Students at Middlesbrough College were amongst the first students in the region to experience a vehicle collision in full 360 degree virtual reality. Working in partnership with Cleveland Fire Brigade the students were offered places at the sessions on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> November which also coincided with Brake Road Safety Week. The film followed a group of 4 young people in a car who ultimately are involved in a collision, the film is rated as suitable for ages 15 and over and does include some graphic scenes but all based in reality and designed to bring home the reality of risk taking behaviour and the subsequent consequences.

*Alcohol Awareness Week* – Students and staff at Middlesbrough College were made aware of the risks and penalties of drinking and driving at awareness sessions held between 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> November in support of Alcohol Awareness week. Designated driver wristbands were given out to encourage groups to select a designated sober driver to ensure everyone gets home safely, 'gift a lift' cards were also given out – the card encourages drivers to give the gift of a safe lift home to someone this Xmas. This was

also replicated at a 'dry social evening' held at Teesside University student's union on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> November.

## **7. National Productivity Investment Fund**

Transport Secretary, Chris Grayling MP, in his announcement of 19 October 2017 set out further details of significant investment for roads, including announcing the next 2 major local road schemes and 76 winners from the recent competition for National Productivity Investment Funding on local roads.

76 projects from across the country have been awarded funding totaling £244 million to bring key benefits to local road users - such as improving access to public transport sites, opening up more roads for cyclists, addressing key local traffic 'pinch points' and supporting the development of new housing.

These schemes will provide much needed upgrades to essential local roads, cutting congestion, improving safety and shortening journey times for drivers. They will also help boost regional economic growth by unlocking jobs and supporting vital new housing development.

Middlesbrough Council, supported by the Combined Authority was one of the successful bidders for A66/A171 Cargo Fleet Roundabout improvement scheme, introduction of a "throughabout" to improve capacity, replace the existing street lighting with LED high masts, replace the central vehicle restraint system with an extruded concrete barrier and provide a new pedestrian/cycle crossing.

Total cost of the scheme is £4.16m with the award from the Department of Transport amounting to £2.95m. The Scheme is proposed to commence in 2018/19 and be delivered 2019/20.