
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel was held on 2 October 2019.

PRESENT: Councillors Saunders, (Chair), Arundale, Branson, Coupe, Furness, S Walker, S Hill (As Substitute for Hubbard) and P Storey(As Substitute for M Storey)

PRESENT AS OBSERVERS: J Cain, BBC Local Democracy Reporter

OFFICERS: S Gilmore, R Horniman, S Lightwing, K Whitmore, N Younis

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Hubbard, M Storey.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no Declarations of Interest at this point in the meeting.

1 **MINUTES - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL - 4 SEPTEMBER 2019**

The minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel held on 4 September 2019 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO 5 - ORDER OF BUSINESS

ORDERED that, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule No 5, the Committee agreed to vary the order of business.

ORDERED that the agenda items were considered as follows: Agenda Item 5, Agenda Item 4, Agenda Item 6 and Agenda Item 7.

2 **CENTRE SQUARE AND SNOW CENTRE - UPDATES**

Centre Square

The Head of Development provided an update on the Centre Square development. The first two buildings had been completed and the Council had taken the head lease on both buildings. The Council was currently in an advanced legal position with a minimum of two companies who wished to rent the office space and the Mayor would shortly be making an announcement.

Building two was completed at the end of June and a snagging exercise had been undertaken. There was a further year's cover for any latent snagging issues. The same exercise took place at the end of September on building one.

Both buildings formed part of the wider masterplan and the Developer had an option on purchasing the rest of the site. The Mayor had previously mentioned that no more office buildings would be built, however this was only partially in the Council's gift since the Developer might choose to provide more office accommodation. The Mayor was looking at the wider area and was keen on developing the urban living either on the site with the consent of the Developer, or adjacent to the site.

In relation to the pond, it was clarified that that space formed part of the option area for the Developer. However, it was anticipated that if the pond was removed, there would be a compensatory water feature and space had been allocated in the masterplan. On the original plan, the pond area was allocated for an underground car park to service the buildings. The Head of Development commented that the Developer would respond to market interest. As a feature, that area lent itself to use that natural depression as part of the site, so a car park was not out of the question but it would be in line with the demand and the interest going forward.

In relation to Council staff currently based in the Civic Centre, options were being considered for where staff would be accommodated in the longer term. If the new buildings were not fully occupied, a partial de-camp to one of them could be an option, but as yet, no decisions had been taken.

With regard to timescale, the Developer had a conditional contract to draw down the remaining land in November. It was likely that the Developer would take the opportunity to purchase the rest of land. Currently the maximum rental for office space in Middlesbrough was around £12 per square foot. However, the rental for the new buildings was likely to be about 50% in excess of that figure, which would lift the whole market in Middlesbrough and encourage investors. In a short period of time, 30,000 square feet of office space had been let in Albert Road North and the Boho buildings were fully occupied.

The issues of increasing urban living and working in the centre of Middlesbrough and the impact on school provision and transport infrastructure were also discussed. It was agreed that there needed to be a joined up approach.

Snow Centre

The Project Manager provided an update on the proposed Snow Centre at Middlehaven. Work had been ongoing for five years and the scheme had been re-designed to maximise interest. There were currently six snow centres operating in the UK, the nearest to the north was in Glasgow and to the south, in Castleford.

The Council currently owned the site, having purchased it from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The Developer had spent the last 4 to 6 months undertaking the detailed site investigation, including gas monitoring, traffic analysis, noise and air quality. Several pre-application meetings had been undertaken with Council Officers and once the final information was assembled, a detailed planning application was anticipated before the end of this year. Members viewed some of the latest images of the snow centre overlooking the docks.

No financial contribution had been given to the Developer by the Council, although there was an element of conditional grant that had been provisionally allocated to enable the Developer to tie their site into the wider site in terms of the public realm. The Developer had to provide evidence of contractual arrangements and funding before commencing work on site. In the first instance, the Developer had approached the Council. Whilst it was not a Council project, it had been facilitated by the Council and a financial contribution had been made to an early feasibility study. The Council had stepped in and bought the land and this was a risk if the project did not go ahead. However it was the best site in Middlehaven and prime frontage.

The projected footfall was 2.25 million per year which related to individual interactions for example, the same person ski-ing, having a meal, visiting the coffee shop, would count as three footfalls.

With regard to transport infrastructure it was noted that the new road and bridge that had completed had made a big difference. The Snow Centre Developer had carried out a transport assessment in the early stages of the project and the Council had requested that this was updated. Discussions had also taken place about installing a bus Superstop and ensuring that the route from the town centre was well signed and well lit.

It had been identified that there would be very busy peak times especially when there was a football match taking place at the Riverside Stadium. Issues concerning the available car parking space needed to be considered. Currently the College allowed people attending the football to use their car park.

The Department for Education (DFE) had recently announced their preferred site for a new secondary school in Middlehaven and this would be located next to the snow centre. The intention was that the new school would be built and operational by 2021. It was also noted that a scrapyard that had been compulsorily purchased by the Council was still awaiting clearance by the owner.

AGREED that:

1. The information provided was received and noted.
2. The Project Manager would provide Members with information relating to business rates and the timeline for the snow centre.

3 INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY

The Director of Regeneration stated that whilst the provision of Broadband was not the Council's responsibility, it was a feature of how attractive a town was as a place to live and work.

Middlesbrough Council had been involved with the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) in a Government programme aimed at getting every area of the country a certain percentage of superfast broadband. At the start of the programme the percentage to achieve was 95%. However, since the programme began, the definition of superfast broadband had changed and there had been several issues. Middlesbrough had benefited from the programme but there were still areas of the town that had poor coverage. There were some issues around communication to industrial sites but most of the issues were low speeds and poor infrastructure in some of the more rural areas.

The TVCA was now leading on the original Government programme and there was funding available. A bid was being made to European funds for some matched funding to upgrade cabinets across the Tees Valley. However, upgrading the cabinets was only part of the solution, there were also procedural and legal issues that needed to be resolved. It was also highlighted that the take up of broadband across Middlesbrough was low and providers would only consider providing a service where it was commercially viable.

In relation to the infrastructure delivery review, further discussion took place with regard to school place planning and recommendations were suggested for the final report. The Council had a duty to ensure sufficient school places for the town's children and more collaborative working was needed within Council departments, schools and academies to facilitate this.

AGREED as follows:

1. The information provided was received and noted.
2. The following terms of reference for the scrutiny review into Infrastructure Delivery were approved:
 - A) To investigate current infrastructure planning in Middlesbrough specifically in relation to broadband, housing development and transport, and how this aligns with local and national priorities.
 - B) To identify and explore the obstacles or challenges to infrastructure delivery.
 - C) To consider mitigation measures that could be put in place to improve the resilience of existing infrastructure.
3. Representatives from BT and Virgin Media would be invited to a meeting of the Scrutiny Panel to discuss broadband coverage in Middlesbrough.

4 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE

A verbal update was provided on the Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings held on 5 and 16 September 2019.