
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel was held on 15 July 2020.

PRESENT: Councillors Saunders, (Chair), Arundale, Branson, Furness, Hubbard, Lewis, M Storey and L Mason (As Substitute for Coupe)

OFFICERS: S Bonner, G Field, R Horniman, S Lightwing, C Lunn, J McNally

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Coupe and Garvey.

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 MARCH 2020**

The minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel held on 4 March 2020 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

A Member raised two queries in relation to Boho X and a development on the adjacent site by the housing organisation, Thirteen. The Democratic Services Officer undertook to obtain the relevant information.

2 **OVERVIEW OF SERVICE AREAS**

The Director of Environment and Community Services provided an overview of his service area as follows:

Recently re-organised, Environment and Community Services now included Environment Services, Property and Commercial Services, Highways and Infrastructure Services, Stronger Communities and the North East Migration Partnership.

The key areas of focus for the service for 2020-2021 included:

- Green Strategy.
- Increased Recycling Rates.
- Increased Tree Coverage.
- Increased range of Bio Diverse Spaces.
- Wildflower areas.
- More Town Wide Cleans and Environmental Volunteers.
- Waste Disposal Strategy post-2025.
- Support the development of an Urban Farm.
- Improve the condition of Middlesbrough's Roads through the Pothole Purge and enhanced highways maintenance.
- Continue to provide great School Related Services.

The development of a Green Strategy would take about six months and making Middlesbrough Council net carbon neutral by 2030 was already Council policy. The national net carbon neutral target was 2050 and the Council's ambition was to be a lead authority on Environmental issues and make Middlesbrough as a town, net carbon neutral by 2040. Working Groups were being set up to deliver an overarching strategy with partners, businesses and citizens and the strategy was expected to be completed in early 2021.

In relation to the green agenda the Council was looking at ways of increasing recycling rates. The present rate across the town was 34% and this was some way off the aspirational target of 50%. An enhanced education and community participation programme was being developed but progress had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. As well as being good for the environment, increased recycling would cost the Council less in waste disposal costs and help with its financial position.

The national average for tree coverage was around 16% and Middlesbrough's coverage was currently 11.8%. 15,000 trees would be planted this year in Middlesbrough and a community planning day was planned for October, Covid-permitting.

Consideration was being given as to how bio diverse spaces could be increased across the town. Traditional methods had been to cut the grass and keep areas neat and tidy but this was not always the most environmentally friendly. By October there would be approximately 30,000 square meters of wildflowers planted. The Council was also keen to get volunteers back on board since the pandemic had impacted on the ability to bring volunteers together.

A confidential report on the procurement of a waste disposal facility had been considered by the Executive. The present incinerator would reach the end of its life by 2025. A significant amount of work needed to be undertaken to ensure Middlesbrough had a waste disposal facility that championed the environment for the next 25 years up to 2050.

The Executive had also taken the next steps in the development of an Urban Farm based at Middlehaven near to the Boho site. The Council would work with the Camphill Trust to develop plans and local Councillors would be involved in the planning.

Additional money had been announced nationally for the maintenance of highways and roads. The pothole purge was now underway, having been delayed by the pandemic. There were two types of activity taking place: cutting out and patching where required and also complete resurfacing where required. The programme was expected to take six months to complete.

Finally, the Council continued to work with schools and provide services including cleaning, catering and school transport. In terms of the Covid-19 pandemic recovery the Council was assisting schools towards safe re-opening in September.

Panel Members posed questions in relation to public transport, the Council's carbon neutral ambition, the Urban Farm, food waste strategy, pot hole purge, and tree coverage and the Director provided answers accordingly.

The Director of Regeneration and Culture provided an overview of his service area as follows:

Regeneration and Culture now included four main areas, three of which fell within the remit of this Scrutiny Panel. The three areas were:

- Economic Growth - including economic development and infrastructure planning.
- Capital Projects- including housing, capital schemes and design services.
- Planning - including the Local Plan, development control and building control.

Priorities for 2020/2021 were listed as:

- Covid recovery.
- Town Centre re-purposing.
- Boho 8 and X.
- Urban living.
- Fill Centre Square and TeesAMP.
- Rail Station improvements.
- Nunthorpe consultation.
- Local Plan.

Covid recovery had not previously been planned for and had had a significant impact on the overall economy and a drastic impact on the town centre. The majority of the Council's work at the current time was focussed on checking and interpreting government guidance for businesses and helping them to safely re-open as quickly as possible.

The town centre had developed as a retail destination but in the future there would not be sufficient demand for a retail centre of that size. The impact of Covid-19 had exacerbated the need to re-purpose the town centre and plan for what happened next. The Council had recently purchased the Captain Cook Square and was finalising the purchase of the House of Fraser building. Funding had been obtained from the Government's Future High Street Fund and money was also available from the Towns Fund to bolster the town's economy as a

whole.

Planning applications for Boho 8 and X had not yet been approved by Planning Committee. However, the Council was looking to grow the digital sector as much as possible and plans were evolving. Boho 8 was in production off site and the Bohouse development frame was up with the internal structure going in.

One of the Mayor's aspirations was to encourage urban living, with up to 4000 people living in the centre of the town. There were several schemes in development and the Council was working on putting some funding packages together to assist with getting the schemes to planning approval.

Another priority was to ensure that space in the Centre Square buildings and at TeesAMP was filled as soon as possible. Interest had been high and a number of companies were going through the required legal process to sign leases.

There was a significant amount of work to do at and around the Rail Station and funding had been secured. However progress was slow. The Council funds would be spent on the public space and the rest on the track by National Rail.

It was intended to take quite a significant amount of housing land through the next Local Plan process. The majority was already allocated but there would be some additional areas. This would entail a long and detailed public debate. Key areas were Nunthorpe and Nunthorpe Grange and it was a Council priority to ensure the community were on board and able to influence the outcome. The Council would complete a detailed consultation with the community of Nunthorpe throughout the year.

Panel members raised queries in relation to the Transporter Bridge, the town centre, bus services and housing development and the Director responded.

The Chair thanked both Directors for attending the Panel and providing information in relation to their service areas.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

3 **SETTING THE SCRUTINY PANEL'S WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021**

The Democratic Services Officer presented a report, the purpose of which was to assist Members of the Panel to consider and agree its work programme for the 2020-2021 Municipal Year.

A list of topical issues and the suggestions received in respect of the scrutiny panel's remit were contained in the submitted report. It was suggested that the Scrutiny Panel should select one topic for full review along with several short topics and updates.

In addition there were two reviews from the previous year to be completed as follows: Recycling and Waste Management/Waste Disposal Facility and Teesside Crematorium (impact of new Crematorium at Stockton).

The Director of Environment and Community and the Director of Regeneration and Culture were in attendance at the meeting and provided additional information as requested by Panel Members.

Members discussed the information provided by Officers at the meeting, the topics suggested in the report and suggestions received from members of the public and the service areas.

Following discussion, Panel Members agreed the following topics for review:

Main Topic:

1. Town-wide Regeneration Post Covid-19.

Short Reviews/Updates:

2. Good management of Trees/Tree Policy.
3. Parking on grassed verges.
4. Update on the Review of the Local Plan.
5. Update from Boro Youth Climate Action Team.
6. Liveable Streets.
7. Broadband.
8. Pest Control.

AGREED that:

1. The information provided was received and noted.
2. The topics listed at 1 to 8 above, would be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for approval.

4 PROPOSED MEETING SCHEDULE - 2020/2021 MUNICIPAL YEAR

A proposed schedule of meeting dates for the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel for the 2020-2021 Municipal Year was submitted for the Panel's consideration.

AGREED that the proposed meeting dates for 2020-2021 were approved.

5 TEESIDE CREMATORIUM - SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

The Chair reminded the Panel that one of the topics from last year's Work Programme was to investigate any potential impacts of bereavement services offered by neighbouring local authorities on those provided by Middlesbrough Council at Teesside Crematorium.

To date, the Panel had received information from the service area in relation to income and had undertaken a site visit to Stockton Crematorium. Panel Members were scheduled to visit Teesside Crematorium on 31 March 2020 to gather further information but due to the Coronavirus pandemic and subsequent lockdown, the visit was postponed.

In order to complete the review the following steps were suggested:

- Invite the Operational Manager from Teesside Crematorium to give a presentation on the service offered by Middlesbrough Council and recent improvements at Teesside Crematorium. (Instead of a site visit).
- Obtain up to date information in relation to income, and mitigation in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.
- Obtain information in relation to fees and charges at Middlesbrough, Stockton and Kirkleatham Crematoria.

This would enable the Panel to complete the Terms of Reference agreed for the review and produce a draft Final Report.

AGREED that the Chair's proposals for completing the review of Teesside Crematorium were approved.

6 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update on the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting which was held on 2 July 2020.