
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel was held on Wednesday 12 January 2022.

PRESENT: Councillors S Walker (Chair), R Arundale (Vice-Chair), D Branson, D Coupe, T Furness, T Mawston and M Saunders

OFFICERS: C Cowley, G Field, S Gilmore, R Horniman, S Lightwing and J McNally

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: were submitted on behalf of Councillors B Hubbard and M Storey

21/47 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

21/48 **MINUTES - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL - 1 DECEMBER 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 1 December 2021 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

21/49 **CAPTAIN COOK SQUARE SHOPPING CENTRE - REGENERATION**

The Director of Regeneration provided an update on the Captain Cook Square Shopping Centre regeneration.

The Council had purchased the Captain Cook Centre some time ago and had initially been focussing on the area around the square near to the car park. Due to some retailers leaving and proactive steps that had been taken with others, the Council now had vacant possession on quite a few units. 60,000 square feet of space had been let to Lane 7 and an E-Sports business would be moving into a unit previously occupied by Peacocks. Both units required some work to make them suitable for leisure use and the frontages would be updated. It was anticipated that both operators would be ready to open by late spring/early summer 2022.

It was highlighted that Lane 7 already had a presence elsewhere in the town centre and at the present time the Council was not aware of any plan to close that establishment, although that would be a decision for the operators.

There were other potential occupiers who were interested in the units and the Council was looking at a reasonable range of different types of leisure use. The pipeline of potential occupiers was healthy and the Council was keen to pursue certain types of business and quality operators, rather than letting units to anyone expressing an interest. At this stage, further details of the other potential operators was commercially sensitive information.

In respect of other tenants in the Captain Cook Centre, particularly retailers, the Council had made them aware that there were other options to accommodate them if necessary. The Council now had a bigger portfolio of space available if existing tenants felt their business did not fit well with the increased leisure use within the Square and wished to relocate elsewhere in the town centre.

The Council had a plan to ensure that the upper floors of the units in the Captain Cook Square were brought into use and not used solely for storage as was generally the case presently. The lettings agreed to date involved usage of the upper floors which would necessitate some changes to the outside of the buildings. The Council was prepared to fund some alterations to frontages, however, they would be relatively cosmetic changes unless the occupiers wanted something different.

Work would also be undertaken to improve the frontage of the bus station and it was confirmed that there was no current plan to move the bus station to a different location.

Some of the potential occupiers were also looking at providing an outdoor terrace. The curtilage of the units included the space up to where the canopy ended. That outdoor space could be used for outdoor eating or potentially other activities. It was the intention that the central area in the square would provide something that would inevitably be seasonal. It could be used as an events space at times, or for extending the eating and drinking potential of different venues to fit their plans. The scale to which venues could use the space would increase and decrease in line with other things that were planned, probably on a seasonal basis.

One consideration for using the central square for events would be whether it could be covered to allow for events in any weather. Whilst it would be difficult and very expensive to install a permanent structure, ideas a temporary structure would be explored.

With regard to the very recent purchase of the Cleveland Centre, it was clarified that this included the shopping centre, car park, former Barclaycard unit and Barclays Bank unit on Corporation Road. The Sports Direct Unit and Centre North East building were not included. The hotel unit formed part of the freehold of the property and was currently under an active lease to the hotel owners. The Council provided a principal loan of approximately £7 million for the hotel in 2016/2017, which was match funded by private investment. The hotel generated a revenue return for the Council of approximately £250,000 per annum. Once the loan expired, the Council could be paid out, or potentially choose to maintain that long term interest if the income revenue was worthwhile.

With regard to the Cleveland Centre, the Council had taken ownership with the intention of operating it as it was for now. Areas such as the car park could be re-purposed as it was larger than was needed for centre shoppers. Potentially the size and designation of spaces could be altered or offered to businesses that wished to buy car parking space in the town centre. However, there were no firm plans at the current time to make any fundamental changes. A request that the scale model of the Endeavour ship was reinstated was noted.

Panel Members congratulated all those involved in the purchase of the Cleveland Centre and the actions taken to secure the town centre.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

21/50

THE GREEN STRATEGY REVIEW

The Head of Economic Growth and the Transport and Infrastructure Manager were in attendance and provided information in relation to the Green Strategy.

The Directorate led on two of the themes within the Green Strategy: the Local Economy theme: how we build our economy and support local businesses to change their behaviours and become more sustainable, and the Sustainable Transport Theme. It was highlighted that this did not limit the Directorate's involvement in other issues, which included the cross cutting themes within Planning, management of Council buildings, the corporate estate, and policies and procedures.

Largely it was for the Council to set an example and provide information and infrastructure to allow businesses and residents, as well as the Council itself, adopt sustainable behaviours and strategies. To do that, the Council needed to provide credible and affordable alternatives for public transport, in particular for people to navigate around the town, and make those positive behaviours more instinctive and not seen as a personal burden or a compromise for individuals or businesses.

The Council's actions in relation to its Green Strategy, were increasingly important given climate change, and especially the current acute situation with energy costs. As well as finding ways to reduce energy consumption, it was vital to find alternative sustainable energy sources to actually drive the economy, both in terms of businesses and transport.

Many principles of the Green Strategy had already been embedded in departmental and Council work for some time. Much of the work was based on existing powers that the Council had and ensuring policies aligned with the Council's aims and existing resources. The Council was exploring new opportunities in emerging funding programmes which involved

cross-working with other authorities and the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA). As well as the emerging Levelling Up funding programmes, the new Shared Prosperity Fund, would hopefully be available later this year. This fund would be the successor to the previous European funding that was largely targeted at energy efficiency and sustainability measures.

In relation to the Sustainable Transport Action Group the Council were developing and expanding the walking and cycling network to encourage a modal shift for Middlesbrough residents, businesses and workers who commuted in and out of Middlesbrough each day.

Within the Local Implementation Plan (LIP) the Council had followed Department for Transport (DFT) guidance and national policy and flipped the road user hierarchy to ensure that pedestrians and cyclists had priority on the road and not predominantly car users. It was acknowledged that it would be a slow process to embed this aim across Middlesbrough but it would ultimately provide gains across the town.

New cycle lanes along Low Lane had been implemented during the last year to ensure new housing developments were connected with existing network and to improve east/west connectivity. The cycle networks were intended to be used by both commuters and families. The Council was developing a travel planning service, which would be embedded in the planning process. When residents moved into new housing developments they would have information, advice and guidance as to how they could access their new neighbourhood and network better than they might have previously. Moving house was an opportunity for people to change their travel habits so the Council wanted to seize that opportunity and work with Housing Developers to hopefully secure some Section 106 funding for new schemes across the town.

Through the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), the Council was in regular contact with transport operators and providers. Operators were keen to expand their networks and grow their services but plans had been severely impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic. Public transport usage had declined during the past eighteen months and the future of the public transport network was uncertain in terms of what the new normal would become.

The five Tees Valley Local Authorities and the TVCA had been working collaboratively with bus operators to establish a Bus Service Improvement Partnership (BSIP). Draft documentation for the partnership was currently out to consultation. It was hoped that the Partnership would help re-route services from different parts of the town to provide better coverage. It was noted that services needed to be financially viable and the Council had not funds to provide subsidies as had been the case in the past.

Work was also ongoing in respect of the rail network and the various franchises to increase more sustainable transport options at each station.

Another key aim was to continue to improve the air quality in Middlesbrough. Monitoring at various junctions in and out of Middlesbrough had shown that there had been improvement in the air quality. One measure was to introduce 20 mph speed limits because low vehicles in urban areas naturally improved the air quality. Most residential areas in Middlesbrough had 20 mph speed limits but there were still a couple of areas where they needed to be implemented. The Council was working with the TVCA to secure additional funding to put more schemes in.

Concern was raised regarding the lack of bus services in the south of Middlesbrough, which was also an area of major housing development. It was suggested that the Council should press for a Passenger Transport Authority for the whole of the Tees Valley area. It was clarified that TVCA was the strategic transport authority for the area. The BSIP would give the local authorities more power to work with local operators and encourage the introduction of smart cards, easy payments options, marketing to encourage young people onto buses and get people out of their cars and onto public transport. Whilst it was a voluntary partnership there was a signed agreement between operators, local authorities and the TVCA. The timescale was for the BSIP to be in place by April 2022. Bus operators were acutely aware of the BSIP and that the Council was keen for them to work on filling in the gaps in the network.

One of the problems of building new housing estates was that initially there were no amenities, shops or facilities and residents had to either walk or travel by car. It was suggested that the infrastructure needed to be included at the time of construction, so that, for

example, a bus route could be put in from the beginning. If people were used to using their car to travel they would keep using it.

An Infrastructure Plan was currently being developed by the Council, which would identify on a map of the whole town, where new developments would be, where pressures on the network would be, and measures that could be implemented to relieve those pressures. The Infrastructure Plan would show the key travel corridors across the town, be colour coded, and easy to understand. The detail behind the Plan would include how those corridors would be funded and where the mechanisms for Section 106 funding would be available. Councillors and the relevant Executive Member would be consulted prior to the Plan being adopted.

Another issue raised was that the implementation of cycle routes was often piecemeal around the town, and not all routes joined up straight away, even though there were plans for them to do so eventually. It was noted that there were often financial constraints which prevented this from happening but that the new Infrastructure Plan would show the overall ambition. Ideally, implementation would not be incremental.

In terms of consultation, the Council had identified that it would be useful to have a business representative to consult with on green strategy initiatives to help drive the private sector forward. Whilst the Council consulted regularly with stakeholders having a business representative at the table would improve transparency and introduce a private sector perspective when developing ideas.

With regard to traffic congestion it was noted that the main constraints on the network were generally experienced at two peak times during the day and coincided with the school day and work commute. During school holidays there was a 20% reduction of traffic at those times and it made a huge difference. If the town could continue to grow with housing and commercial developments but live with the school holiday level of traffic that would be ideal. The fact that more people were working from home since the Covid 19 pandemic should also have a positive impact.

A Panel member commented that it was important to have a map or plan of all the cycle routes around Middlesbrough. Many cycle paths were not designed to be the most direct route and this could lead to people cycling on the roads to reach their destination. It was confirmed that whilst the Council did have a map available it needed updating. In addition a new cycle signage strategy was being developed for the town.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chair thanked Officers for their attendance and input.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

21/51 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 9 FEBRUARY 2022**

The next meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel would take place at 10.30 am on Wednesday 9 February 2022.

21/52 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE**

The Chair provided a verbal update on the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 7 December 2021.

21/53 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED**

None.