



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 11th January 2016

PRESENT : Cllrs. Lugg (Chair), Hampson (Vice-Chair), H. Norman (Spokesperson), Haigh, Lewis, S. Witts, Dee, Beeley, Hansdot, Pearsall, Toleman, Etheridge, James and Organ

Others in Attendance

APOLOGIES : Cllrs. Gravells, Field and Randle

80. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest at the start of the meeting. During discussion of agenda item 6, Asset Management Strategy 2016-2021, the Chair declared a personal interest in Gloucestershire Airport by virtue of her role as a Director.

81. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 30 November 2015 and 7 December 2015 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chair.

82. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no questions from members of the public.

83. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions or deputations.

84. ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2016-2021

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The Chair welcomed Councillor James, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economy and Mr Anthony Hodge, Head of Regeneration and Economic Development, to the meeting.

Members were presented with a report which sought approval for a new Asset Management Strategy for the period 2016-2021.

Councillor James summarised the key headlines of the strategy before inviting comments from the Committee.

Members discussed the following matters:-

1. A Member enquired whether a different approach had been taken as opposed to previous asset management strategies. Councillor James responded that there were no huge differences and the emphasis was on trying to get all information as up to date as possible.
2. Turning to paragraph 9.4 of the strategy, a Member asked what weaknesses had been identified. The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development replied that it was intended to improve car parking within the City Centre by introducing automatic vehicle number plate recognition systems and improved pay on foot payment methods which would also be disabled friendly. The Member noted that the new system would enable more data to be collected on car park usage. Another Member drew on his experience of using a similar system at Cheltenham and concurred that it was 'disabled friendly'.
3. A Member referred to the under-utilisation of land at the Eastern Avenue Depot and asked if there were any plans for the site. Councillor James advised the Member that the land would be used by Amey for servicing their Highways contract with the County Council and that the matter would be kept under review. Another Member urged caution and said it was important not to rush into decisions during an ever changing climate.
4. There was a discussion on land at Blackfriars and the Fleece Site. Members noted the challenges posed by the historic site to potential developers.
5. A Member queried the impact of the sale of the King's Walk Shopping Centre. Councillor James commented that the Council benefited from significant rental income from the site.
6. A Member reflected on the fact that despite car parking generating over £2M gross income, the Council was unable to find £50K for the Shopmobility Service.
7. A Member sought clarification on the sale of 27-29 Commercial Road. Councillor James reported that following a marketing exercise contracts had been exchanged with a preferred bidder in December 2015. The development would be subject to Planning permission and successful negotiations with the Ministry of Justice and the Canal and River Trust.

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8. A Member commented that the document provided a useful 'stock take' of the Council's assets and noted that the redevelopment of the prison site was pivotal to opening up road links and retail opportunities within the City Centre.
9. Two Members referred to operational issues regarding the use of North Warehouse car park by Regus. The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development advised the Members that the situation was being monitored and asked Members to refer any concerns to him.
10. A Member sought clarification on whether any covenants existed regarding use of land at Parton Road in Churchdown. The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development agreed to provide this information to the Member.
11. A Member queried plans for Gloucestershire Airport. Councillor James reminded the Committee that the Council had taken a policy decision to support the Airport and not to build houses there and that this show of confidence had resulted in new businesses operating at the Airport. At this point the Chair declared a personal interest by virtue of her role as a Director of Gloucestershire Airport.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

85. HOUSING DELIVERY IN GLOUCESTER

The Chair welcomed Councillor Organ, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning, and Mr Anthony Wilson, Head of Planning, to the meeting.

Members were presented with a report which updated them on housing delivery within the City. The report also outlined to Members how the City would meet its housing need up to 2031 through joint working with its neighbours Cheltenham Borough Council and Tewkesbury Borough Council. Included in the report was an update on the 'Gloucester Growth Housing Zone' designated by the Department for Communities and Local Government in March 2015.

Councillor Organ summarised the key headlines in the report before inviting comments from the Committee.

Members discussed the following matters:-

1. A Member pointed out a 'typo' at paragraph 3.7. Councillor Organ thanked the Member for spotting it.
2. A Member asked if developers would be deterred by significant archaeological considerations posed by building in Gloucester. Councillor Organ responded that the situation was complex and that there was a wide history and multi-culture in different parts of the City. He noted that Gloucester's house prices had not gone up in the same way as its neighbours. Archaeological assessments were expensive and would end up being reflected in the price of the land purchase. Councillor Organ added

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that the presence of chemicals and pollution also had to be taken into account in deciding the best use for land.

3. A Member requested that paragraph 4.1 relating to Asset Based Community Development considerations be removed from the report as it was too vague and did not demonstrate that these factors had been taken into account.
4. A Member asked how the Housing Zone money would be spent. The Head of Planning gave Members a breakdown of how the funding would be allocated.
5. A Member noted that there was no funding for social housing.
6. Turning to paragraph 3.19 of the report, a Member queried what progress had been made at land east of Hempsted and the former MOD Oil Storage Depot in Hempsted following the granting of planning approval. The Head of Planning agreed to provide this information to the Member.
7. A Member commented that he was pleased to see that old brownfield sites such as the old Diamond Works would shortly be brought back into use. Councillor Organ acknowledged the comment and added that the biggest drawback to the sites was the existence of chemicals in the ground.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO CABINET:-

1. That paragraph 4.1 be removed from the report.
2. That the report be noted.

86. STRATEGY FOR CLADDING BUILDINGS IN THE CITY CENTRE

Councillor James, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economy, presented Members with a report which informed them of the background with regard to the treatment of unattractive facades within the City Centre. The report also indicated where work would now focus.

Councillor James summarised the key headlines in the report before inviting comments from the Committee.

Members discussed the following matters:-

1. A Member asked how long the cladding would last. Councillor James explained that cladding was not a long term solution and would last about 5 years.
2. A Member queried the purpose of putting temporary cladding which would deteriorate and become unsightly on a building which currently had a neutral appearance and was not offensive. The Member added that it was important to accept the variety of building styles within the City Centre. Councillor James replied that he believed the cladding would enhance the building's appearance at a modest cost. Another Member asked what a 'modest cost' entailed. Councillor James stated that it would cost about £10K and that this would be funded from the City Centre Investment Fund.

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3. A Member asked if cladding had been used successfully in other parts of the country. The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development referred the Member to Liverpool where cladding had been used to good effect and commented that the cladding would be a talking point and would make Gloucester a vibrant and interesting place.
4. A Member remarked that the cladding would be easily cleaned and could be painted over and added that he believed it was better than having an eyesore.
5. A Member reminded Councillor James that Overview and Scrutiny Committee could make any recommendations that they considered appropriate and asked him to take on board the comments which had been made. Councillor James agreed with the Member's statement.
6. The Chair drew the debate to a close. There was no consensus of opinion on the subject with the Committee being split on their opinions of the effectiveness of cladding.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

87. CABINET FORWARD PLAN

Members considered the latest version of the Cabinet Forward Plan.

RESOLVED – That the Cabinet Forward Plan be noted.

88. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the latest version of its work programme and amended it in line with suggestions made by Members.

RESOLVED – That the work programme, as amended, be noted.

89. UPDATE ON OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no updates on this occasion.

90. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 8 February 2016 at 18.30 hours.

Time of commencement: 6.30 pm hours

Time of conclusion: 7.45 pm hours

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Chair