

# MINUTES OF WHITTLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 MARCH 2019

## PRESENT:

### Members of the Committee:

Councillors Sandison (Chair), Bearne, Brader, Douglas, Gillias, Leigh Hunt and Mrs O'Rourke

### Also present:

Councillor Lowe (Growth and Investment Portfolio Holder)

### Officers:

Stephanie Chettle-Gibrat (Head of Growth and Investment), Paul Mernagh (Street Scene Team Leader), Colin Horton (Green Spaces Officer) and Linn Ashmore (Democratic Services Officer)

## 22. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 10 December 2018 and 13 February 2019 were approved and signed by the Chair.

## 23. WORLD RUGBY HALL OF FAME AND TOWN CENTRE HERITAGE – UPDATE ON PROGRESS OF THE REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

Two separate items were placed on the agenda of the meeting held on 10 December 2018 to receive a 12-month progress update against the review recommendations for the World Rugby Hall of Fame review and the review of Town Centre Heritage. The Committee had several unanswered questions and decided that the topics should be carried forward to this meeting and the Head of Service invited to attend.

The Head of Growth and Investment gave members a verbal update answering the questions raised at the last meeting.

During the update and discussion, the following points were made:

### ***World Rugby Hall of Fame***

#### *Marketing and Action Plan*

The new Place Marketing Officer had taken a proactive approach to marketing. A detailed marketing plan had been tabled at the Visitor Economy Working Party for approval. This would take time to put in place and gather momentum and allow the recommendations to be taken forward.

The Marketing Plan contained a range of actions including the introduction of a series of passes:

- An Annual Pass to allow repeat visits and encourage pass holders to re-visit through the publicising of various events. The upcoming 'an evening with Clive Woodward' event was a sell out and another similar event was planned for three months' time.
- A Corporate Pass that could also be used to promote the hiring of meeting rooms.
- A weekend pass would provide a wider offer incorporating access to the Hall of Fame and Rugby School and town centre retail offers. A press release would be issued in March 2019 to promote this.
- A Rugby Experience group pass would specifically target the travel trade. Work had been carried out to engage with Rugby School to attract coach tours and coach parties. Visits would also include town centre tours and the Webb Ellis Rugby Football Museum.

Members asked about connections to Wasps Rugby Football Club based at the Ricoh Arena and other associated clubs and neighbouring teams, and were informed that it was hoped that these types of links could be developed.

The Marketing Plan was considered crucial as the average monthly visitor numbers had steadily declined since the attraction was opened:

2016 – 2798  
2017 – 978  
2018 – 371  
2019 (Jan/Feb) - 253

Members asked about possibilities of changing the displays and were informed that officers had met with representatives of World Rugby who would continue to review the content. A further meeting was planned in November 2019 to discuss the future of the attraction. The Place Marketing Officer also had fortnightly phone conversations with the marketing team at World Rugby.

New inductions into the Hall of Fame are planned to coincide with the World Cup.

Members commented that advertisement signage at the railway station were small and unreadable. It was noted that this was due to the cost of advertising and that any adverts were at the discretion of Network Rail. The signage was under an annual contract which can be reviewed to see what can be done differently.

Members raised a number of points and suggestions including:

- Advertising on national clubs' websites could also be explored.
- The Rugby experience could be widened to incorporate other local attractions and could be publicised through local pub schemes and the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA).
- There was no specific rugby focussed publication which could promote interest.
- Advertising should be carried out as far afield as possible.

Members commented that the attraction should be advertised at the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Centre and explore offering packages to its members. The Head of Growth and Investment undertook to refer this to the Visitor Economy Working Party and raise it at a meeting with management at GLL.

### ***Town Centre Heritage***

Many of points raised at the last meeting would be covered within the ongoing work on the Town Centre Spatial Strategy, as endorsed by the Visitor Economy Working Party and the Asset Management Working Group.

Once the strategy was in place this would be an ideal case for leveraging in external funding to support public realm improvements, signage and quality design that reflects the town centre's historic character.

Members commented on the Museum and Art Gallery and the work to link current collections to local heritage and diversity in the community. It will be necessary to create space at the Art Gallery and Museum for social history but there was already good work being regularly undertaken at RAGM, the Benn Partnership, and Arts Council funding was being sought to hire specialists to look at the Redding collection to see what potential could be explored further.

The Committee was informed that there was a local list of heritage assets available and planning officers were aware of the resources available, including GIS mapping tools. The list was intended to be organic but there was a formal procedure for adding to the list by application through the Council. It would be necessary to have contact with the building owner so that any 'new' buildings can be added to the list.

Members were keen that the heritage of the old Herbert Grey College site was not lost during proposed development and that future design briefs incorporate the requirement to retain particular architecture or features.

**RESOLVED THAT** – the Head of Growth and Investment be thanked for attending the meeting.

## **24. DISCUSSION ON PERFORMANCE WITH THE GROWTH AND INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

The committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 6) concerning performance in the Growth and Investment portfolio area.

Councillor Lowe attended the meeting and gave Members an outline of progress in his portfolio focussing on town centre economy, inward investment and affordable housing provision.

During the briefing and subsequent discussion, the following points were made:

## *Town Centre Economy and Inward Investment*

A reduction in footfall due to online shopping and out of town retail parks were not problems that were unique to Rugby and were a result of changes in consumer shopping habits.

There were examples of town centres enjoying a renaissance, such as St Albans, because they have responded by adapting to change.

A business case based on investment in the town would build on its qualities. Rugby was one of the fastest growing towns in the West Midlands and benefited from having good connectivity to London and Birmingham. It was important to maximise on those advantages to promote growth and attract investment.

Examples of change included:

Rugby First Limited – Cllr Lowe sat on the interview panel for the new Operations Director. Mr Rich Warren had been appointed due to his will and expertise to promote the town as a business destination of choice.

Economic Development Manager – a new post has been created at the Council to foster and promote the local economy, focussing on the town centre.

Funding – the Head of Growth and Investment had worked hard to identify sources of funding for regeneration projects.

Town Centre Strategy – work had been carried out to update the strategy and feed into spatial strategy work as an approach to an overarching future town centre vision to include interlinking town centre assets.

The aim was to generate funds and work up a business case for the town centre vision. Through Rugby BID and the Coventry and Warwickshire Growth Hub the Council was seeking expressions of interest as the first phase of the project to transform the town centre. The outcomes of this first phase were expected in June.

A revenue fund of £165,000 had been made available through the programme delivered by the LGA and the Office of Government Property to work up the One Public Estate Bid. A business case would be produced to bring forward the site.

It was important to create an environment attractive to businesses.

Support through Warwickshire County Council and the Chamber of Commerce, including start-up schemes, had a positive impact on making the town a better place to do business.

Rugby had lagged behind other towns in terms of improving growth, but it had turned a corner, although there was still more work to be done.

During further discussion the following points and questions were raised:

All partners connected to the OPE project would be engaged.

Q. There was resentment from the local business community that they were not engaged in shaping the town centre. Will there be a change of direction?

A. It is hoped that a change in the management of Rugby First Limited would improve the relationships.

The long-term vision for the town centre was based on attracting more people to live there and create a demand for more shops, bars and eateries based on the current Independent Quarter model and to plan improved transport links.

There had been a lack of face-to-face discussions. The market traders were keen to stay in the town but Rugby First were more interested in income generation. In the past they were more focussed on the BID Rangers and street cleansing services, and they need to do more to promote the town.

It was acknowledged that Rugby First had lost its way but with the new manager in place it was anticipated that the approach would be radically different. The Council would work closely with them on achieving the future vision. Mr Warren had the skills needed to attract investment and was passionate about making a difference.

### *Affordable Housing Provision*

It was acknowledged that the figures had dropped significantly over the past couple of years, but this trend was starting to reverse and an upswing in the number of completions and acquisitions had been seen this year.

There were two key reasons for the fall in numbers, including the reliance on large sites that were beyond the control of the Council, that progressed very slowly, and viability assessments had resulted in a reduction in the levels of affordable housing provision.

In addition, Registered Providers often prefer to develop their own affordable housing sites (rather than purchase from developers) and land supply has been limited in the Borough.

The target of 40% was considered higher than many authorities, and in practise it had been more realistic to achieve 30% in the past. The forthcoming Local Plan includes a target of 20% for brownfield sites and a new target of 30% for other sites which better reflects the trends in the Borough over previous years.

The new targets would be more deliverable while ensuring that there was adequate provision over the Local Plan period.

The portfolio holder reported that during quarters 1 – 3 this year 87 new affordable homes had been delivered and a further 72 were forecast during the first half of next year. The Council was doing everything possible to achieve its targets.

Members requested information on the public consultation events for the former Herbert Grey College site be shared with both borough ward and county ward councillors, and answers to specific questions raised about how requirements for C2/C3 housing would be met. In addition, a request was made for display boards to be set up so that all interested councillors could view the application information.

Members were advised that the Principal Planning Officer would be requested to respond to the points raised.

A councillor asked if there was any information on progress of the site of the Avon Mill Public House and was informed that there was no update available at this time.

**RESOLVED THAT –**

- (1) the new Operations Director from Rugby First Limited be invited to a future meeting of the Committee; and
- (2) Councillor Lowe be thanked for attending the meeting.

**25. GREAT CENTRAL WAY BRIDGE REPAIRS**

The committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 6) concerning factors relating to the Draft General Fund Revenue and Capital Budgets 2019/20 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2019-23 approved by Cabinet on 7 January 2019.

The report to Cabinet showed that no budget had been allocated for 2019/20 for capital expenditure for repairs to bridges owned by Rugby Borough Council on the Great Central Way.

No details of assessments or remedial works had been reported and Councillors Sandison, Roodhouse and Douglas requested that, in accordance with Standing Order 14.7, the topic be called-in and referred to overview and scrutiny.

The bridges along the Great Central Way were located in six separate wards covering a distance of 5.8km and many are situated in high density urban areas used for walking, nature and cycling (Sustrans route 41 runs on the southern section of the GCW).

The Street Scene Leader attended the meeting to present the report and answer questions.

During discussion the following points were made:

A capital appraisal carried out had determined that there were enough funds in reserve that could be carried over to 2019/20, hence no further funding was requested in next year's budget.

It was acknowledged that presenting Members with a financial report stating that the budget was nil, with no explanation, was misleading.

Since 2008 around £950,000 had been spent on refurbishment works and regular inspections and there was an ongoing rolling maintenance programme in place.

Bridges on Bridge Street, Clifton Road and Hillmorton Road were most at risk due to their construction using a combination of steel and brick.

Principle Bridge Inspections in 2017/18 identified certain bridges that will require additional Specialist Inspections. These will be done in 2019.

Members raised concerns regarding potential damage caused by trees or roots and were informed there was only minor growth on the structures at the moment. Works will be ongoing to remove any major vegetation / tree growth within 3 metres either side of all bridges over the next few weeks.

An additional site visit will follow to spray herbicide and chemically treat any tree stumps to prevent further growth.

Relevant ward members will be contacted when works are taking place.

As the programme of works was rolled out any missing coping stones would be replaced if they remain adjacent to any bridges.

It was acknowledged that the bridge on Ashlawn Road was owned by Warwickshire County Council.

Officers would explore any opportunities for possible funding available towards maintenance work on the bridges.

**RESOLVED THAT –**

- (1) relevant ward councillors be kept informed of progress in the rolling programme of works to bridges on the Great Central Way; and
- (2) the Street Scene Team Leader be thanked for attending the meeting.

**26. REVIEW OF PARKING AT THE QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE CENTRE – DRAFT REVIEW REPORT**

The committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 7) concerning the draft review report.

Following a meeting between the Chair and the Head of Growth and Investment and Head of Environment and Public Realm some proposed recommendations had been circulated by email to the Committee for consideration.

During discussion the following points were made:

There was a lack of joined up working between the venues on the site. However, larger scale events would be determined by league timetables and were probably out of the control of the venues.

For large scale events, organisations should be creating event plans to include details on how the increased volume of users, visitors and cars would be managed and marshalled.

It was suggested that the Council could provide guidance on alternative parking for when there was a clash of events. It may be possible to approach the United Reformed Church, the Hospital of St Cross or Lawrence Sheriff School. An alternative previously identified was the parking provision at the GEC Recreation Ground. GLL should be asked to co-ordinate this.

Having marshalls, as part of the organisers event plan, would be helpful to direct traffic to alternative parking, or a shuttle bus service could be considered.

It had been previously reported that local budget gyms had reduced the level of demand at the leisure centre. However, GLL had responded to this by successfully adapting its business model.

The Council had a scheme to offer free parking in the town centre, so it would be counter-intuitive to charge for parking at a council owned facility.

There were apps available to show live parking information.

It would be preferable to avoid enforcement and have a proper parking scheme in place, but better control of mis-parking was needed, particularly during major events.

The land adjacent to Thornfield Indoor Bowls Club would provide additional parking but it was reiterated by officers that as GLL had previously declined to enter into a lease agreement, and the parks and grounds team were using this as a compound and access area for the improvement works to the recreation ground, this area was not available for the foreseeable future.

Members discussed the proposed recommendations and agreed that they should be incorporated into the draft review report.

It was agreed that the first of the two recommendations previously identified should be removed from the draft review report, but the use of an ANPR (automated number plate recognition) parking scheme that been proposed by GLL and supported by the Committee at its last meeting required further discussion.

Since the last meeting officers had carried out research on the current enforcement powers in place. There was a current order in place allowing parking for a period of four hours.

The Committee agreed that the short-term recommendations proposed should be submitted to Cabinet on 1 April 2019 for approval and a further report be brought back to the next meeting to explain why an ANPR parking enforcement scheme should not be recommended.

The medium and long-term recommendations would also be considered further at the next meeting.

**RESOLVED THAT -**

- (1) the short-term recommendations be submitted to Cabinet on 1 April 2019 for approval;
- (2) officers be requested to report back to the next meeting with further details on the option of an ANPR parking enforcement scheme and why this should not be recommended; and
- (3) the Committee to consider the medium and long-term recommendations further prior to submission to Cabinet.



## 27. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19

The committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 8) concerning the progress of scrutiny reviews and the overview and scrutiny forward work programme for 2018/19.

### *Access for People with a Disability*

Members commented that the review should allow time for a detailed report to be produced and that task group members had not been briefed on relevant legislation.

There were access issues that needed to be addressed. The Open Spaces Officer reported that work was being carried out on work relating to Public Spaces Protection Orders and discussions were being held with the communications team on updating the Council website to include access information and aerial photographs of parks which would give users a better impression of the access and facilities.

### *Future Work Programme*

Councillors Gillias, Leigh Hunt and Mrs O'Rourke declared their interest in taking part in the review of the Special Expenses Scheme.

The following review topics were suggested for inclusion in the 2019/20 work programme:

- Due to the continued growth in the town, response times for the emergency services, including police, fire service and ambulance should be reviewed.
- A second fire station was being planned for the town and there was a need to understand what investment was being made. This could be linked to a wider review of infrastructure in south west Rugby in the context of the Local Plan. The Infrastructure Delivery Manager from Warwickshire County Council could be requested to provide information and evidence as part of that review.

### **RESOLVED THAT –**

- (1) progress in the task group review be noted; and
- (2) the suggested review topics minuted above be put forward for inclusion in the 2019/20 overview and scrutiny work programme.

**CHAIR**