

ECONOMIC GROWTH SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY 12 APRIL 2021 AT 4.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Brown (Chair), Councillors Mrs Atkinson, Denholm, Mrs Glendinning, Meller, Mitchelson and Mrs McKerrell

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillor J Mallinson – Leader
Councillor Ellis – Deputy Leader and Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder
Councillor Christian – Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder
Councillor Mrs Mallinson – Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder
Councillor Nedved – Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder
Ms Thorn – Regional Director of Riverside North Region (until 4.33 pm)

OFFICERS: Corporate Director of Economic Development
Housing Development Officer
Policy and Communications Manager
Overview and Scrutiny Officer

EGSP.21/21 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Paton.

EGSP.22/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest affecting the business to be transacted at the meeting.

EGSP.23/21 HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE PHILIP, DUKE OF EDINBURGH

The Panel observed a minute's silence as a mark of respect to the memory of His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

EGSP.24/21 PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was agreed that the items of business in Part A be dealt with in public and Part B be dealt with in private.

EGSP.25/21 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2021 be approved.

EGSP.26/21 CALL IN OF DECISIONS

There were no items which had been the subject of call-in.

EGSP.27/21 RIVERSIDE UPDATE

Speaking by way of introduction the Corporate Director of Economic Development indicated that Members would recall that Ms Paton was Regional Director of Riverside. Ms Paton had now retired and both the Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder and herself had written to thank Ms Paton for the sterling work she had undertaken for Riverside in Carlisle. Ms Paton

had attended Panel meetings on a regular basis to respond to questions and the Corporate Director felt sure that Members would also wish to express their appreciation to her.

In response, the Chair asked that the Panel's and her own personal thanks to Ms Paton to be placed on record.

The Housing Development Officer was pleased to introduce Ms Thorn, the new Regional Director of the Riverside North Region who brought a wealth of local knowledge and experience to the role. Members of the Panel had expressed an interest in learning more about Riverside's regeneration and development plans and so Ms Thorn's update would hopefully be of particular interest.

Ms Thorn, Regional Director of the Riverside North Region presented the Riverside Update (Report ED.12/21).

Ms Thorn summarised, in some detail, aspects of Riverside's business activities and future plans including Customer Services; Riverside Office, Botchergate; Impact Furniture Service (IFS); Strategic Investment Framework; New Development; Decarbonisation Strategy; Manchester United Foundation / Carlisle United Community Sports Trust project; Cumbria Skills Shortage project and Neighbourhood Plans.

Ms Thorn further reported that:

- Customer Services: customers who experienced real challenges financially continued to be supported through Riverside's Income Maximisation Teams who provided a level of support to access benefits and to assist in whatever way they could.
- IFS: Riverside would be looking to partner with alternative recycling services to ensure that their customers continued to have the opportunity to source low cost furniture and did not end up in furniture poverty; and would ultimately look to partners to ensure that any reusable furniture from empty properties was recycled.
- Neighbourhood Plans: some confusion had arisen around the utilisation of the name 'Neighbourhood Plans'. Following further consultation, it had been determined that 'Community Plans' better described what Riverside was doing and they were working with customers to understand their neighbourhoods and what needed to be done to make them great places in which to live.

The Chair welcomed Ms Thorn to her first Panel meeting and expressed thanks for her attendance

Members raised the following questions and observations during their scrutiny of the report:

- *Referencing the impending closure of the Impact Furniture Service (IFS), a Member questioned whether, as part of the decision making process, consideration had been given to the utilisation of social media / selling of second-hand furniture on line; and whether that could be looked at moving forward.*

Ms Thorn replied that on-line social media selling had been introduced approximately three years before; Riverside had quite a good social media presence and was selling furniture via that medium. That did not, however, diminish the differential between IFS overheads (employment costs, insurance, premises, collection and delivery vehicles, etc) and income generated. Neither did remodelling - a volunteer-based service delivery through outsourcing to other community delivery opportunities or consolidation into one location result in a cost neutral business plan that would enable the service to 'wash its own face'.

- *A Member noted (paragraph 2.9) that Riverside had identified their first four Neighbourhood Plans and that it had been agreed to look at Raffles first and Botcherby second. She questioned which two Neighbourhood Plans would follow.*

Ms Thorn undertook to investigate and respond.

Another Member noted that the report recorded that the appraisal for Botcherby had been started and Riverside would then move on to Upperby and then Petteiril Bank/Harraby.

- The Raffles Neighbourhood Plan was progressing well, with customer surveys taking place next week. A Member sought clarification as regards the type of questions posed and the feedback received in response thereto.

Another Member questioned the level of community engagement on what they saw as the vision for the area; and whether Members could be involved moving forward.

Ms Thorn indicated that she would provide the Panel with a detailed response. She was aware that the Raffles survey had been conducted virtually through telephone calls, social media and Teams channels as opposed to the normal physical presence on the estate e.g. drop-in sessions at a community facility. That could be progressed as lockdown restrictions eased.

During discussions at the Carlisle Partnership a Member had expressed a desire for Riverside to include questions around how COVID had changed the lives of their customers and how the use of properties differed as a consequence thereof. Although it had been too late to action that for the Raffles estate, questions had now been included as part of the standard questioning bank within those Neighbourhood Plans in order to aid understanding of what more Riverside needed to do to support customers to live and work at home. That may also influence a change in terms of the design of future properties

On the latter point, Riverside did engage with their strategic partners and Member involvement was absolutely a possibility.

The Member added that she personally lived on an estate with mixed housing and the difference in how people were interacting and what they used in the area was astounding.

- A Member commented that the majority of the new development schemes in contract in Carlisle were under Section 106 Agreements. She sought clarification on the difficulties of progressing such schemes without Section 106 contributions and questioned whether any other funding could be utilised.

Ms Thorn advised that funding associated with new development / affordable housing was a challenge and the money available to Riverside for investment in new build properties was not infinite. Members would, however, note from the pipeline that Carlisle was one of those strategic locations which received a fair proportion in terms of available investment for properties. She added that Riverside was always reliant upon some Government grant to support that through Homes England and continued to work with Carlisle and the other strategic partners across Cumbria to ensure that grant opportunities into Cumbria were maximised as far as possible.

- *Substantial consultation between Riverside, the City Council, Carlisle College and the developer had taken place with regard to the brilliant Beverley Rise development. Were any similar schemes coming through the pipeline?*

In response, Ms Thorn explained that Riverside would always look for opportunities to maximise what could be done in terms of social value on the back of investment to maximise that economic value locally. Clearly partnership working would be required to source young people. Now that an established model was in place, work would continue with developers on other schemes.

- Referencing the Manchester United Foundation / Carlisle United Community Sports Trust project, a Member reported that she was a teacher and that Carlisle United had visited her school. Her pupils had benefitted from that excellent scheme.
- The report detailed that one year remained on the lease of the Riverside office in Botchergate and that it was now likely that the ground floor would remain empty until the lease expired. Bearing in mind that the ground floor constituted a large area on the high street in the entrance to Carlisle City, a Member asked whether there was anything which could be done to repurpose that area as opposed to leaving it empty.
- *In terms of new development and the provision of social housing, a Member asked whether developers were good at meeting the forecast completion dates.*

Ms Thorn replied that obviously there had been delays in the handover of the pipeline projects in the last twelve months but, as soon as those contractors had been allowed back on site, they had continued to work and deliver. Ultimately it was in everyone's interests to get those properties built and handed over as soon as was possible. It would be necessary to refocus that view after lockdown, but the new revised dates were on the whole being delivered and achieved.

- A Member asked for an explanation in layman's terms of the information provided at paragraph 2.4 regarding the Strategic Investment Framework.

Ms Thorn explained that Morton was one of Riverside's key neighbourhoods where they managed stock. An assessment had been undertaken covering the aspects set out. That work represented the normal due diligence which would be done on any estate to understand the demographics, what the drivers were and what the long-term future sustainability of that neighbourhood would require in order to keep it stable.

Riverside did not wish to see the emergence of large numbers of empty properties in an area since that would inevitably lead to a decline. There was some experience of that now around one-bedroom flats which detracted from an area and it was therefore timely to take action to understand whether more needed to be done to ensure the longer term viability of that neighbourhood.

The Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder stated that Chairing the Carlisle Liaison Group for the past few years had provided a unique insight into Riverside. Some quite rigorous lines of questioning had taken place, including the IFS and ground floor of the Riverside Office in Botchergate, and it was hoped that responses would be forthcoming over the coming weeks and months.

The Portfolio Holder felt that much progress had been made as regards the level of contact and responses received from Riverside over the last few years and that the relationship had been transformed.

Referencing the Beverley Rise development, the Portfolio Holder further believed that to be a template moving forward. The hands-on training and development opportunities for apprentices to address skills shortages as part of the partnership project had been exceptionally beneficial.

He wished to see that work pursued and felt sure that the Panel would agree. It was a great pity that it had not been possible to undertake a similar scheme at Dalston Road.

The Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder noted that Riverside had an important investment portfolio going forward, much of which was centred around the City Centre; and that St Cuthbert's Garden Village would be an important element of that strategic vision. He asked whether Ms Thorn was able to give any indication as to whether St Cuthbert's Garden Village would be given the same level of commitment and prospects as other city centre sites since there was an opportunity for the City to invest in social and affordable housing moving forward.

In response, Ms Thorn explained that St Cuthbert's Garden Village was on Riverside's strategic portfolio of areas for investment. They were keen to see how those plans would develop.

The Chair then thanked Ms Thorn for her presentation of the report.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Riverside Update (ED.12/21) be noted.

(2) That the thanks of the Chair and Members of the Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel for the attendance and work undertaken by Ms Paton during her time as Regional Director of Riverside Carlisle be placed on record.

(3) That Ms Thorn, Regional Director, Riverside North Region be requested to provide responses on the following:

- Neighbourhood Plans - details of the customer survey questions and feedback received as part of the consultation exercise.
- The level of engagement on what the community saw as the vision for the area; and whether Members could be involved moving forward.

Ms Thorn left the meeting

EGSP.28/21 CARLISLE PLAN 2021-2023

The Policy and Communications Manager submitted report PC.10/21, the purpose of which being to progress the adoption of a new Carlisle Plan forming part of the Council's Policy Framework.

The Policy and Communications Manager explained that the draft Carlisle Plan comprised a main document containing the detail behind the Plan, together with a summary 'Plan on a Page' listing the Council's vision, principles, priorities and programmes/projects. The two priorities were Economic Growth and Health and Wellbeing. He added that Corporate Plan would be developed over the coming months in parallel to the Carlisle Plan. A further key point of note was that a Performance Reporting Task and Finish Group was underway which would enable preparation of a detailed quarterly performance report from April 2021 onwards.

The Executive had considered the matter at their meeting on 8 March 2021 (EX.30/21) and referred it to the Panel for consultation.

The Policy and Communications Manager concluded by inviting the Panel to consider and comment on the draft Carlisle Plan, with particular reference to the economic growth priority and programme.

The following observations / suggestions were raised during scrutiny of the Carlisle Plan 2021-2023:

- *The Vision – ‘To enable Carlisle to grow and prosper as the capital of the Borderlands region, benefitting the health and wellbeing of the people of Carlisle.’ was welcomed. However, that statement lacked depth in terms of addressing inequality and poverty. Nor was there any mention of low-cost affordable housing.*

If the Council was serious about true inclusivity, that meant looking at every area of poverty and inequality. It was requested that further consideration be given to ‘The Vision’ and that the Carlisle Plan go out to public consultation.

- *A more creative approach to the wording / terminology and compilation of the document would aide understanding and ensure that it was user friendly for the public.*
- *The Plan needed to include a greater focus on tourism and the Economic Strategy as that would be an important factor in driving change and the prosperity of Carlisle.*
- *The Economic Growth priority stated that “we aim to deliver inclusive and sustainable economic growth, ensuring we provide opportunities for all our communities to prosper”, yet no mention was made of the means by which that would be achieved. Similarly, the statements on page 29 concerning the Citadels for example were lacking in detail in terms of the level of investment and how discussions with the University were coming to fruition.*

The Deputy Leader, and Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder acknowledged that Members were correct in the sense that the key economic growth programmes and projects were referenced within the Carlisle Plan, but there was no real link within the document to state why they were significant if one was not planning or able to go to University in Carlisle; why moving the University to the Citadel was so important; how many jobs would be brought into the City or how it would help the high street to survive. Further clarity was therefore required.

The Deputy Leader further explained that he was particularly keen on both sustainable and unsustainable growth (unsustainable in terms of new businesses being empowered to start up and try to grow whilst acknowledging that, statistically, a significant number of new businesses do not last more than three years) to deliver a more prosperous society and thus improving standards of living and quality of life. The Plan could be more visual and informative to aide understanding.

- *Referencing the three principles (Clarity, Confidence and Commitment), a Member questioned how much consultation had gone into understanding the needs of Carlisle’s residents.*

In response, the Leader stated that COVID-19 had presented somewhat of a bar to consultation. However, now that lockdown measures were easing serious consideration could be given to public consultation.

The Leader further took the Member’s point regarding the Citadels which could be better populated as time goes by.

The Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder commented that the draft Economic Strategy was nearing completion and would be coming back to Committee in due course.

Tourism could bring immense scope and potential money into the City and should perhaps be given greater credence within the Carlisle Plan. Projects including the Carlisle Station Gateway

and Project Tullie; and improvement of the visitor / night-time economy were of critical importance. Further detail may also be needed as regards housing provision.

The Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder then thanked Members for their most helpful and useful comments.

The Policy and Communications Manager added his thanks to the Panel for their feedback.

A Member sought clarification that the revised draft Carlisle Plan, taking account of the comments raised, would come back through the Scrutiny process.

The Leader replied that Scrutiny was entitled to review the document should they so wish.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel had considered and commented upon the draft Carlisle Plan 2021-2023 (PC.10/21).

(2) That the Panel made a series of observations / suggestions (outlined in the bullet points above) for the Executive to consider in the development of the final Plan document.

(3) That the Panel wished to have sight of the revised draft Carlisle Plan at a future meeting.

EGSP.29/21 SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer submitted report OS.12/21 providing the draft Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel section for the Scrutiny Annual Report 2020/21. Members' attention was drawn to the key items for the Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel, comments in relation to which were invited.

No comments were forthcoming, and it was:

RESOLVED – That the Panel had considered the Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel section of the Scrutiny Annual Report (OS.12/21).

EGSP.30/21 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented report OS.09/21 providing an overview of matters relating to the work of the Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel. The latest version of the work programme was also included.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer highlighted a number of items which were not included within the Panel's work programme, together with a resolution from the 26 November 2020 meeting [2) That a review of the parking permit scheme at Talkin Tarn be carried out] which remained as pending, details of which were recorded at Section 1.

RESOLVED – That the Overview Report incorporating the Work Programme and Key Decision items relevant to the Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel be noted (OS.09/21).

EGSP.31/21 CHAIR'S COMMENTS

Since this was the last Panel meeting of the current Municipal Year, the Chair wished to place on record thanks to the Overview and Scrutiny Officer for her hard work and the excellent assistance provided over the past year.

[The meeting ended at 4.55 pm]