

SWT Scrutiny Committee - 11 November 2020

Present: Councillor Gwil Wren (Chair)

Councillors Libby Lisgo, Ian Aldridge, Norman Cavill, Simon Coles, Dixie Darch, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Dave Mansell, Derek Perry, Nick Thwaites, Keith Wheatley, Ray Tully and Sue Buller

Officers: Paul Fitzgerald, Marcus Prouse, James Barra, Chris Brown, Alison North, Kerry Prisco, Andrew Pritchard, Jane Windebank, Wendy Lewis and Shane Smith

Also Present: Councillors Mark Blaker, John Hassall, Janet Lloyd, Peter Pilkington, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Sarah Wakefield, Alan Wedderkopp, Brenda Weston and Loretta Whetlor

(The meeting commenced at Time Not Specified)

84. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Stone and Wedderkopp.

Councillor Tully substituted for Councillor Stone

85. Declarations of Interest

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Councillor or Clerk of a County, Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr N Cavill	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Hunt	All Items	SCC & Bishop's Hull	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Mansell	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Perry	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Tully	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr G Wren	All Items	Clerk to Milverton PC	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Councillor Tully declared a personal interest as having a family member who lives in a property that's part of the Woolaway development.

86. **Public Participation - To receive only in relation to the business for which the Extraordinary Meeting has been called any questions, statements or petitions from the public in accordance with Council Procedure Rules 14,15 and 16**

No members of the public had requested to speak on any item on the agenda.

87. **Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan, circulated with the agenda).

Councillors were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Governance Team.

A request was made for an item of Homefinder to be added to a future committee.

Resolved that the Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan be noted.

88. **Executive Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Executive Forward Plan, circulated with the agenda).

Councillors were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Governance Team.

Resolved that the Executive Forward Plan be noted.

89. **Full Council Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Full Council Forward Plan, circulated with the agenda).

Councillors were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Governance Team.

Resolved that the Full Council Forward Plan be noted.

90. **Verbal Update on Section 106 Spend**

Councillor Rigby provided a verbal update on the section 106 spend and set out the Projects and expenditure along with the system set up to track where section 106 funding is directed. This was following the result of a recent Audit where it was established that, there were not sufficient measures in place to track section 106 funding and the timescales in which funding needed to be spent.

- The Heritage Mills funding was questioned, the portfolio holder would have a conversation about the project outside of the meeting.
- The committee were Disappointed to hear the situation around the delays in the Section 106 spend and looked forward to hearing further conversations about a solution.
- The system of how section 106 money was tracked would be reviewed to ensure choices choice were made in how the funding is utilised.
- The committee requested for Involvement and consultation with ward and parish councillors in the process in future.
- It was recognised that a wider conversation about 106 funding was needed, concerns were expressed over the lack of monitoring of funds that had been unspent.
- Members expressed concerns over significant housing developments not making the contributions necessary to support the infrastructure.
- The Committee questioned when the last occurrence of section 106 funding timing out, the earliest was from 2018, there was no evidence that this had been checked since then, with no system or central record of this.
- Concerns were expressed that there were substantial sums of money that developers were benefitting from due to a lack of monitoring. Parish Council access to section 106 funding was important to ensure there was awareness of the funding available and access to this.
- Travel plans were needed to be kept up to date for developers to be held to account.
- It was agreed there should be more broadly defined instances of the section 106 agreement where possible.
- The section 106 officer was aware of the situation and the results of the audit carried out.
- The Portfolio holder committed to continue to liaise with all councillors and developers on the nature of section 106 funding, this item would be considered again in the New Year.

The Committee noted the update.

91. **Access to Information - Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Resolved that:- The Scrutiny Committee Recommended that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the next item of business on the ground that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 respectively of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

92. **North Taunton Woolaway Project**

The North Taunton Woolaway Project is the flagship regeneration project of the SWT's housing development programme which set out to tackle some of the Council's worst performing homes in one of the most socially deprived areas in the County.

The Report recommended the approval of funding for all future phases of the Project as set out in Appendix A. The budget for Phase A and Enabling Works for Phases B-E totalling was approved in February 2019. This included the purchase of owner occupied properties and decanting tenanted properties. A confidential financial summary was

included at Appendix D for the purchase of the private property, which was within Phase C of the Project.

The Project set out the demolition of homes in Phase A and would start building 47 new homes with the first of these properties completed by August 2021 with Phase A estimated to complete by September 2022.

To ensure a smooth transition between all future phases and to quicken the pace of regeneration, permission was being sought to approve the budget to fund the regeneration of the remaining Phases B–E.

The Project would deliver new Council homes and was an essential part of the Council's commitment to offer a choice of good quality homes for residents, whatever their age and income, in communities where support is available for those in need. The proposals identified in the Report would identify the funding and assist the progression of the remaining Phases (B–E) in a timely manner and provide certainty and security to the North Taunton Woolaway Project tenants.

During the discussion the following points were raised:-

- The low carbon ambition as opposed to zero carbon were questioned.
- The scheme was based on building regulations, these were the requirements in terms of specification.
- Under the pre-contract agreement the contractor would consider efficiencies to deliver maximum low carbon benefits.
- There were challenges around the amount of low carbon changes in the construction.
- There were more opportunities in future phases for additional carbon reduction measures in the construction, this would be reported to members.
- Further details on the specification would be provided before the Executive report. Information would be modelled to ensure the right balance. This would be assessed within the next 2-3 weeks.
- The contingency fund was built into Appendix A, this could be balanced between fabric and technology depending on the benefits of the carbon reduction and the comparable cost.
- Impact on recent developments of phosphate issues as part of the planning application were considered. This was anticipated to be a short to medium term impact.
- Provision of affordable homes were encouraged. Tenants returning can retain their social rent agreement. The affordable rent arrangements were considered along with the percentage split.
- Reducing the carbon impact of construction was considered. More information was requested over the energy use of the residents.
- Heat pumps and insulation were encouraged on the projects. The same Zero carbon standard was the ambition with all the projects to be considered in the agenda.
- Feedback from the residents was very positive and residents were looking forward to the development and their future homes.
- The specification for phase E had not been agreed, it was anticipated that this would be complete around March 2021.
- The committee were positive to see the ambition from the three project and the progress of the zero carbon ambitions and positive responses.

- The resident's feedback and ensuring a positive impression was an achievement and progress had made on the positivity and public perception of the project. Those living in the houses and the surrounding area were supportive of the scheme.
- Councillors praised the community involvement with the contractor repainting the local community centre after it was damaged by fire.
- EIA and Legal implications of the Woolaway project was considered.
- The impact assessment from February last year was included. It was questioned if a full up to date EIA would be provided. An updated EIA could be provided by the end of the year.
- Disabled facilities grants were considered, a full response in relation to these would be provided outside of the meeting.
- Calculations had been undertaken with engineers to ensure the flood risk was fully understood.
- The expense of the zero carbon improvements were considered contrasting their benefit.
- Councillors commended officers for their community engagement.
- It was questioned if the land value had been factored into the capital development cost. This has not been factored in but could be provided with planning permission.
- Costs around phosphate had not been factored in, this was determined as too early to tell what the impact would be.
- The sustainability of the projects were questioned with the reliance on borrowing. Calculations had been undertaken on the benefits and the cost of the borrowing repayments. The project would be a 60 year lifespan guarantee.
- This was considered as affordable as set out and included in the HRA business plan and HRA debt during the planned period.
- Fluctuations in the construction index were discussed. It was determined there was a good amount of contingency in the budget.
- The increase of regeneration costs of north Taunton was considered high. Inflation was recognised as a factor alongside the potential of a shorter timescale of the project.

The Scrutiny Committee recommended the purchase of the private dwelling as set out in confidential Appendix D.

The Scrutiny Committee supported the following recommendations to Full Council:-

1. To allocate a total scheme budget and borrowing requirement for Phases B-E and the conclusion of the regeneration scheme as set out in confidential Appendix A.
2. Delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer to determine the final funding profile for each future phase once the finalised designs have been received for Phases B-E and any relevant planning approval and contract costs have been received.
3. To approval the decant of tenants within Phases B which will allow Gold band status in the Homefinder Somerset allocations system for tenants in this Phase and allow those who wish to move outside the regeneration area sufficient priority to move home.

4. Delegate authority to the Director of Housing and Communities in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing authority to approve future decanting and demolition for future phases.
5. All new build properties (Phase A-D) will be set at affordable rents in line with the 2020 Rent Setting Policy. The affordable rents will be set to ensure scheme viability at between 60% and 80% of market rates. However, all NTWP SWT secure tenants who lived within the NTWP (Phases A-D) at February 2019, when the Council made its decision to regenerate the neighbourhood, will have their rents capped at the equivalent social rent if being rehoused in the new NTWP development. These rents will remain with the tenant as long as they retain their tenancy. No current NTWP SWT tenant will be required to pay above the equivalent social rent and service charge for their home in line with the Council Shadow Full Council approval to allow existing SWT tenants to remain on a social rent level.

93. **Seaward Way, Minehead - New Build HRA Low Carbon Homes**

The Site is owned by Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT), and had a planning consent for residential development. It adjoined a SWT scheme under construction for light commercial development of two industrial units.

It was proposed to develop the site as an exemplar scheme of new homes for the Council to showcase an innovative approach to house building and its commitment to affordable housing throughout the district and addressing climate change.

The scheme would re-purpose an existing Council asset into much needed housing stock for our residents in the former West Somerset area, together with community benefit from high performing houses that are cost efficient to maintain. It would result in the improved general appearance of the area and the gateway to Minehead.

During the discussion the following points were raised:-

- The committee commended the project with new housing being needed for the community in this part of the district.

The Scrutiny Committee recommended:-

(a) Approval of the development of Affordable Homes built to very low carbon standards, subject to planning approval.

(b) To approve the supplementary budget as stated in confidential appendix A.

(c) To approve the transfer of land from the general fund to the housing revenue account for the use of social housing development and to delegate authority to the Section 151 officer to approve the final land transfer amount.

(d) Delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer to determine the final funding profile for this scheme once the finalised design has received planning approval and tenders have been received.

(e) Note the use of affordable rents for these new build HRA homes in line with the 2020 Rent Setting Policy. The affordable rents would be set to ensure scheme viability at a percentage of market rates.

94.

Oxford Inn New Build HRA Zero Carbon Homes, Taunton

The report recommends the development of new council HRA homes on the Oxford Inn site, Taunton.

The scheme would be built to the specifications being developed as part of the Zero Carbon Affordable Homes Pilot approved by members in July 2020 which was now at procurement and planning pre application stage.

This site was located in the Halcon and Lane area of Taunton is owned by Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) and fell under the HRA and was formerly operated as a public house.

The scheme would demolish the existing buildings and new homes would be built broadly on the existing footprint. The development would result in the improvement of the appearance of this prominent corner site and deliver very energy efficient housing with low energy bills for the residents in line with the benefits envisaged of the Council's Zero Carbon Affordable Homes Pilot.

During the discussion the following points were raised:-

- The committee welcomed the development into the area which was considered long overdue for regeneration, the site had remained empty for some time and had fallen into a state of disrepair.
- The ambitions of the Zero Carbon affordable homes pilot was welcomed, along with providing energy efficient housing for the residents.

The Scrutiny Committee recommended:-

(a) Support of the use of the vacant SWT public house for new zero carbon affordable homes.

(b) Approve the demolition of the Oxford Inn

(c) Approve the development of affordable homes built to standards emerging from the Zero Carbon Affordable Homes Pilot, subject to planning approval.

(d) Allocate a total budget and borrowing requirement in line with confidential Appendix A.

(e) Delegate authority to the Section 151 officer to determine the final funding profile for this scheme once the finalised design has received planning approval and tenders have been received.

(f) Note the use of affordable rents for these new build HRA homes in line with the 2020 Rent Setting Policy. The affordable rents will be set to ensure scheme viability at a percentage of market rates

(The Meeting ended at Time Not Specified)