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SCRUTINY BOARD (INFRASTRUCTURE, INVESTMENT & INCLUSIVE GROWTH)

THURSDAY, 17TH FEBRUARY, 2022

PRESENT: Councillor P Truswell in the Chair

Councillors J Bentley, N Buckley, K Dye,
B Gettings, J Gibson, L Martin, M Shahzad,
N Sharpe, J Taylor and P Wadsworth

53 APPEALS AGAINST REFUSAL OF INSPECTION OF DOCUMENTS

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents.

54 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no exempt information

55 Late Items

There were no formal late items

56 Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations raised at the meeting

57 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Hussain and J Goddard.

Councillor J Gibson attended as a substitute on behalf of Councillor Hussain, for the duration of the meeting.

58 Minutes - 19 January 2022

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the 19 January 2022 be approved as a correct record.

59 Flood Risk Management

The Board received a report from the Flood Risk Manager, which examined the implementation of the Flood Risk Management Strategy over the last 12 months and provided a summary of future measures.

In attendance for this item were:

- Cllr Helen Hayden – Executive Member
- Jonathan Moxon – Flood Risk Manager

Following an introductory presentation, the following matters were discussed:

- In future the flood sector will need to consider the impact of a changing climate
- Major flooding incidents emphasise the need to think and act differently
- How best to utilise the latest technology and balance engineering with place making.
- The need to be innovative in securing funding for interventions which can deliver multiple benefits.
- The Council's declared Climate Emergency
- Catchment wide and regional approaches to flood risk management
- Nature based solutions and green finance models

Members received an update on several individual schemes including Otley Flood Alleviation Scheme, Potternewton Flood Alleviation Scheme and the Killingbeck scheme within the Wyke Beck programme.

Responding to questions and comments from Members the Board was provided with the following information:

- Natural infrastructure is being used to manage flood risk in many places, bringing additional benefits for the environment and local people.
- Residents need to be made more aware of planning guidance in relation to paving gardens and the process for applying for the relevant permissions.
- Garden guidance has recently been updated and republished by the planning directorate. This will be circulated to Board members.
- The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) is a planning document – national guidance is set out by the Environment Agency. The council has undertaken a level one assessment of flood risk and is awaiting confirmation from the Environment Agency as to whether this is deemed to be compliant.
- Once feedback is received from the Environment Agency the Council is intending to commission further modelling as part of a level two assessment to consider the impacts of climate change on the city.
- It is anticipated that the impacts of climate change will increase the risk of different areas of the city flooding and increase the potential frequency of flooding in other places already known to be at risk.
- It is hoped that the new SFRA will be in place by September 2022.
- The Local Plan Update is one of the ways in which the Council can influence place making through new development, including 'making room for water'.
- Officers provided an update on the collapse of Newlay weir. Despite several requests from the Council, the Environment Agency has yet to provide the independent structural assessment of the cause of the collapse. As a result, the weir remains in a collapsed state – some additional work has been undertaken by the Council to protect the design of FAS2 and the Environment Agency has also carried out work on the flood banks to ensure there is no increased risk of flooding for residents.

- There is a need to revise flood risk calculations in the context of climate change to update the parameters for engineering interventions in future.
- Work with Polly Cook (Chief Officer, Sustainable Energy and Air Quality) on a Resilience and Adaption plan for the city is ongoing.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted and a further update on the Flood Risk Management Strategy be presented to the Board in 2022/23.

60 Inclusive Growth Update

The Chief Officer for Economic Development provided an update on the Council's progress on delivering Inclusive Growth.

This included an overview of the Leeds Economic Recovery Framework, which outlines the Council's approach to recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, and what is happening at a local level to continue to deliver Inclusive Growth.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Eve Roodhouse, Chief Officer, Economic Development
- Cllr Jonathan Pryor, Executive Member

Following an introduction from the Chief Officer and Executive Member the following issues were discussed:

- Economic recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Employment growth trends and vacancy levels.
- Deloitte Crane Survey 2021 recorded development starts in the city centre of Leeds at the highest since 2007 and an 83% increase from 2020.
- 2021 saw a record level of residential construction in the city - Leeds City Council is in the top 1% when it comes to delivering new housing with 4,950 new units delivered in 2021.
- Members requested 2019 data relating to empty retail units.
- Good progress is being made in green economy research with the centre for progressive policy - this will inform a refresh of the Inclusive Growth Strategy.
- The administration and distribution of over £296m of business support grants since the start of the pandemic.
- It was confirmed that the latest Government support grants associated with the Omicron variant had been processed at the earliest opportunity following confirmation of the city's financial allocation.
- Initiatives delivered locally to support and encourage the visitor economy. Members requested the promotional information for the Eat Leeds campaign to share with local networks.

- Concerns about the impact of the anticipated rising cost of living, particularly for energy costs, on low-income households.
- Footfall figures as compared to 2019 levels.
- The development of the Best City Ambition.
- The success of the Leeds Apprenticeship Recruitment Fair and the development of a new apprenticeship website. Members will be provided with promotional campaign toolkit to enable them to promote the apprenticeship programme.
- Year of Culture as a catalyst to accelerate economic recovery.
- The planned submission of the Council's Future Talent Plan for consideration by Executive Board in March 2022.
- Future of city and local centres work
- Use of the Social Progress Index to measure Inclusive Growth.
- Significant programmes to transform the city centre including work on the Headrow, City Square and the Corn Exchange.
- Success in securing inward investment and funding via the West Yorkshire Combined Authority for projects, which will drive regeneration and create new jobs.
- The anticipated continuation of hybrid working patterns.

It was confirmed that the Inclusive Growth Strategy will be reviewed later this year and that a range of stakeholders – including elected members – will be engaged in that process.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted and that a further annual update be provided to the Board in 2022/23.

61 Housing Mix: Recommendation Tracking Report

The report of the Director of City Development updated the Board on progress made in responding to the recommendations arising from the Board's 2015/16 inquiry into Housing Mix, which focused on the delivery of Policy H4 as expressed in the Core Strategy.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Cllr Helen Hayden – Executive Member
- Martin Elliot – Head of Strategic Planning, City Development
- Sarah Hellewell - Principal Planner, City Development
- Ian Mackey – Team Leader, Neighbourhood Planning
- Christa Jolley – Executive Mgr. Regeneration

The Principal Planner provided an update on progress and activity relating to each of the recommendations.

Recommendation 3

All members were invited to a training session on viability led by the District Valuer in August 2021. Viability training is now part of the annual programme of training for elected members.

Viability appraisals are submitted depending on site circumstances with affordable housing the biggest S106 cost for developers.

Members expressed concern that viability may be used by some developers to avoid fulfilling commitments to deliver affordable housing.

An update was provided in relation to the pipeline for brownfield development. Contrary to previous trends, most housing completions are now in the city centre.

The Head of Strategic Planning advised the Board that the current pipeline of development within the city will help to ensure that the council maintains its five-year land supply.

The Council continues to be successful in securing funding via WYCA to help clean up brownfield sites so they can be released for development.

Members sought reassurance that the process for testing viability is robust.

Officers advised the Board that national guidance makes provision for viability.

Evidence relating to viability appeals is scrutinised by the district valuer. There are currently a lot of viability appraisals being submitted in relation to the 'build to rent' model of housing development, which is a relatively new model for Leeds.

The Council is working with partners to interrogate the viability case strategically within the city centre to see if there is a need to look at managing the policy in a different way.

It was agreed that Recommendation 3 remains at Position Status 4.

Recommendation 4

The Council is exploring options to provide further training for officers who carry out Housing Needs Assessments.

Housing Market Assessments collate data to determine the state of the housing market in specific localities. Recent HMAs have included Lincoln Green, Holbeck and Morley.

Holbeck and Lincoln Green HMAs are intended to support the Council's wider priority neighbourhoods approach. The Morley assessment will support the development of the local Town Plan.

HMA's are data driven and are used to determine how the Council targets resources in different areas. HMA's can be provided to members on request.

The Board reiterated that housing remains a key concern for communities right across the city. As such members are keen to engage wherever possible if documentation is being produced that may influence the final shape of development within localities.

It was agreed that Recommendation 4 remains at Position Status 4.

Recommendation 5

Members were provided with an update on outcomes for the city in relation to Neighbourhood Plans. There are 19 plans in place.

There is significant variety of Neighbourhood Plans in Leeds reflecting different solutions for the needs of different communities. Support is being provided for a further 15 plans.

Neighbourhood Plans have the potential to deliver a range of outcomes for communities – for example, through local green space designation.

Leeds is taking part in a government pilot of a new approach to neighbourhood planning, focused on encouraging the development of more Neighbourhood Plans by disadvantaged communities and in a simplified form. Harehills and Chapeltown will be taking part in the pilot.

It is hoped that future neighbourhood plans will reflect the increased importance of the impact of climate change on development.

Members expressed concern about levels of engagement in referendums on Neighbourhood Plans.

The level of local engagement in neighbourhood planning is an important means of building community capacity to engage with future consultations on other planning issues.

It was agreed that Recommendation 5 remains at Position Status 4.

Recommendation 8

Attention was drawn to the tables in the report detailing the progress in delivering improved housing mix across the city.

Consideration of housing mix at pre-application and application stage has secured improved delivery of three-bedroom homes in the city centre.

There has been a significant increase in the delivery of two-bedroom properties and a decrease in four bedroom properties.

The Board discussed concerns about the conversion of office space to residential accommodation.

The Board was advised that of the affordable housing completions over the last eight years 50% have come through registered providers, 25% through S106 delivery and 25% through council housing delivery.

600 affordable homes were delivered last year, which is the highest rate for more than ten years. It was noted that in addition to targets for in-year need, further homes are needed to address a historic backlog in delivery.

The Council is working with registered partners to look at how sufficient levels of affordable housing can be delivered. Barriers include land availability and ensuring affordability in the context of increasing construction prices.

Members agreed that further clarity is now required within the policy to strengthen requirements for the delivery of appropriate housing mix.

The Council is currently scoping the next local plan update – it may be that the sections on housing mix are updated to reflect the changing context for development over the last decade.

Ambitions to diversify the city centre market and deliver more family homes should be considered within the context of wider investment in city centre place making to provide a family offer.

Currently targets for housing mix are within the supporting text of the policy and therefore do not carry the same weight as the uppercase provisions.

Members explored how funds provided in lieu of affordable housing can be used to support wider development. Further information about the use of commuted sums in different areas of the city can be provided to members. The Board agreed this was an issue that members would like to explore in more detail.

It was agreed that Recommendation 8 remains at Position Status 4.

Recommendation 9

Officers are in the process of re-drafting the Implementation Note and a final version will be provided to members in due course.

Concern was expressed by Board members about the ranges reflected in planning policy, which are designed to enable flexibility.

The 'ebb and flow' in the delivery of affordable housing through Homes England funding was outlined and members were advised of changes in the way in which the structure of government funding will change.

It was agreed that Recommendation 9 remains at Position Status 4.

Recommendation 10

Following the adoption of the Core Strategy, policies H8, 9 and 10 relating to space standards and older people have been embedded in practice. The monitoring of the outcome of the application of those policies will come to the Board via the formal performance routes.

It was agreed that Recommendation 10 remains at Position Status 4.

RESOLVED –

The following position status was agreed for each of the following recommendations:

- Recommendation 3: Position Status 4
- Recommendation 4: Position Status 4
- Recommendation 5: Position Status 4
- Recommendation 8: Position Status 4
- Recommendation 9: Position Status 4
- Recommendation 10: Position Status 4

Members agreed that a recommendation should be provided to the successor board that further work on the use of commuted sums is carried out in 2022/23.

62 Work Schedule

RESOLVED – To note and approve the work schedule for 2022/23.

63 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Resolved - To note the date and time of the next meeting as Wednesday 6 April 2022 at 10.30am (there will be a pre-meeting for all Board members at 10.15am.

(The meeting concluded at 13:00)