

Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) Inquiry into the East and South East Leeds Regeneration Project

Summary report of the working group meeting held on 6th April 2009.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 A working group of the Board met on 6th April to consider evidence in line with session one of the Board's Inquiry into the East and South East Leeds (EASEL) Regeneration Project.
- 1.2 Session one of the Board's Inquiry focuses on the background to the EASEL project and understanding its main objectives. The working group received a report from the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods setting out the background to the project, including a project timeline summarising the activities and milestones associated with the project and the procurement of the partner developer. This report is attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.3 The following Members and officers attended the working group meeting to discuss the evidence submitted:
 - Councillor B Anderson (Chair of the Scrutiny Board)
 - Councillor G Hyde
 - Councillor L Mulherin
 - Angela Brogden, Principal Scrutiny Adviser
 - Stephen Boyle, Chief Regeneration Officer
 - Peter Anderson Beck, Head of the East Office, EASEL and Aire Valley Leeds Regeneration
 - Maggie Gjessing, Senior Project Manager, EASEL
- 1.4 A summary of the key issues raised by the working group is set out below.

2.0 Main issues raised

Objectives of the EASEL project

- 2.1 In acknowledging the objectives of the EASEL project, as set out within the Director's report, the working group questioned whether these remained relevant and if so, the level of priority given to each one. In response, it was highlighted that whilst the project objectives are ambitious, they all remain relevant and receive the same level of priority as collectively they are linked to the success of the project.
- 2.2 During the meeting, the working group decided to address each of the project objectives separately to determine key responsibilities for achievement.
 - *Creating affordable, attractive and high quality mixed tenure housing.*

- 2.3 It was highlighted that whilst the Council is in control of the planning system for meeting this objective, the necessary investment needed to fulfil this objective would come from the partner developer, Bellway.
- *Increasing housing choice for existing residents and attracting new higher income residents to achieve a diverse and sustainable housing market*
- 2.4 It was reported that the Joint Venture Company (JVCo) aims to seek to increase housing choice for existing residents and attract new working residents into the area to achieve a diverse and sustainable housing market. Key to delivering on sustainable mixed communities, the intention here is to be able to offer existing residents affordable homes to buy and rent and to provide greater diversity of house types for families in different circumstances.
- 2.5 Given the long term nature of the EASEL project, the working group acknowledged that it was the Council's responsibility to ensure that by continuously checking changes in local housing markets, future development will be designed to match people's changing aspirations in the area. This will mean that the project continues to further promote the EASEL area as somewhere people want to live and work by providing the most appropriate mix of tenures to meet demand.
- *Investing in new and existing assets to transform the image and attractiveness of the area, realising the potential of its high quality green spaces.*
- 2.6 It was noted that whilst it would primarily be public sector funding used to achieve this objective, which would be phased in during the duration of the project, the Council was also bidding to external bodies, such as the Access to Nature grant scheme, which is part of the Big Lottery Fund. It was noted that the EASEL Project Team within Regeneration was also working closely with Parks and Countryside in exploring opportunities for external bids for the parks within the area.
- *Creating lively, busy centres for new neighbourhoods with good schools and local services.*
- 2.7 It was acknowledged that to attract new residents into the area will require investment not just in housing but also in learning and training, by improving the neighbourhood environment and by investing in neighbourhood centres and green spaces. The working group noted that the JVCo will have objectives in these areas in order to transform the image and attractiveness of the area and to create lively, busy centres for new neighbourhoods with good schools and local services making the areas places where people want to live and work.
- 2.8 Whilst noting the key role of the JVCo and Planning in trying to attract the necessary investments into the EASEL area, the working group recognised that the current economic climate had a significant influence on this particular objective as it links to the positions of other key partners such as health,

education and retail investors. In view of this, the working group stressed the importance of the Council communicating this to local residents to make it clear that such influences are outside of the Council's control.

- *Solving the underlying social and economic problems of the area focusing on improving attainment and skills, reducing crime and blight and promoting employment and enterprise.*

- 2.9 In terms of leadership on this particular objective, it was noted that the Council would take the lead along with two key external partners: Education Leeds and Job Centre Plus.
- 2.10 It was recognised that a key aspect of the regeneration activity will be to address worklessness and low skills in the EASEL communities to enhance the economic well-being of the EASEL area.
- 2.11 Whilst commitments had been given by Bellway to provide employment and training opportunities to local residents in the EASEL area, including job guarantee apprenticeships, the working group acknowledged the importance of getting people 'job ready' for such work opportunities as employers were not compelled to provide jobs to local people, particularly in view of the current economic climate, and therefore the focus was on continuing negotiations with employers to help achieve this objective.
- 2.12 In relation to job creation issues, the working group recognised the need for the government to be putting in further resources for more intervention work to prepare people for work. In acknowledging that the government had not committed funding for job creation, the working group noted that such funding would come from the Council's capital investment programme.
- 2.13 The working group was informed of the work already being conducted by the Council in addressing this matter, for example, through the worklessness project pilot. Whilst acknowledging that such work is clearly resource intensive, the working group recognised the long term benefits of this investment in terms of raising the aspirations of local people and minimising the need for other service interventions.
- *Capitalising on existing public and private sector investment opportunities in schools, hospitals, and the neighbouring Aire Valley.*
- 2.14 The working group acknowledged that the EASEL programme is the Council's most significant area based regeneration programme commitment to date. In view of this, all available resources, including most importantly mainstream funding, will be maximised and co-ordinated to achieve the outcomes of the Regeneration Investment Programme; alongside the return to the Council from the development process.
- 2.15 It was reported that the JVCo will seek to capitalise on existing public and private sector investment opportunities in schools, hospitals and in the neighbouring Aire Valley Leeds by working with partners to promote

developments which will contribute to the wider EASEL objectives and will complement its own developments. It will also ensure that in planning developments or in promoting investment, that there is ease of movement within and to and from the EASEL Area.

- 2.16 It was also noted that the EASEL Team was in discussion with the Homes and Communities Agency (the organisation through which central government will channel investment in housing and infrastructure) to secure their support for infrastructure and site assembly investment.

Governance arrangements for the Joint Venture Company

- 2.17 It was acknowledged that the setting up of a Joint Venture Company (JVCo) with Bellway was to provide the primary delivery vehicle under the Council's EASEL regeneration initiative. This JVCo is to deliver neighbourhood masterplans and subsequent developments across the EASEL area.
- 2.18 The working group was reminded that the governance arrangements for the Joint Venture Company (JVCo) were already being examined by the Council's Corporate Governance and Audit Committee. However, at its March meeting the Scrutiny Board had requested further details of the remit and membership of the EASEL steering group set up by the Executive Board. In view of this, the working group received copies of two Executive Board reports dated April 2007 and November 2008 which set out the overarching governance arrangements for the JVCo, which included details of the EASEL steering group.
- 2.19 In April 2007, the Executive Board agreed the main terms of reference for the EASEL steering group. This steering group, with cross party and independent representation, was approved to act as a principal consultee to give an overview of the JVCo and the regeneration investment programme.
- 2.20 It was noted that the responsibilities of the steering group include: oversight, monitoring and review of the EASEL initiative; receive briefings prior to joint venture company board meetings; receive reports on key projects at development stage; provide an advisory role on emerging issues and provide reports to Executive Board where necessary.
- 2.21 The EASEL steering group will provide, monitor and assess proposals to support Executive Board in its areas of responsibility. The steering group should therefore provide advice and assessment of all key proposals relating to EASEL. Such proposals may originate from the Council, its key partners and stakeholders, from community representatives or from the partnership company.
- 2.22 The steering group will also need to be involved in the business of setting the overarching framework for what the Council wants to deliver in the EASEL area. This will be done partly through the proposed neighbourhood planning programme and partly through the delivering of the investment in the area (by developing sites and through the regeneration spend). The steering group

would then also be responsible for monitoring the performance of the partnership company as it delivers development proposals.

- 2.23 The membership of this steering group includes the Leader(s) of Council and Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Housing; nomination from the East and North East Homes Leeds board; Chair of Inner East Area Committee; two opposition representatives; and a representative of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).
- 2.24 In terms of this membership, the working group queried why local MPs had not been included as it was felt that such representation, both now and in the longer term, could also help to drive forward the programme. It was noted that the membership of the steering group was agreed by the Executive Board.

Area Action Plan and Neighbourhood Planning

- 2.25 The working group was informed that following changes to planning legislation, the Unitary Development Plan for Leeds will be replaced by a Local Development Framework. City Development has been responsible for the development of a number of Area Action Plans (AAP) looking at land availability for housing, greenspace, employment and infrastructure.
- 2.26 It was reported that City Development has undertaken a consultation process on the AAP progressing from a series of options to a “Preferred Option” and are in the process of developing the evidence base for the AAP on cross cutting issues such as retail and transport provision prior to preparing the submission version of the plan.
- 2.27 The process through which the broad proposals and areas of potential change identified by the EASEL AAP will be developed in detail is called “Neighbourhood Planning”.
- 2.28 The process will have two elements, a technical exercise through which site development options and local infrastructure proposals will be developed and a community engagement programme to communicate these options to residents to get their views and provide an opportunity to develop the local plan.

Consultation with local residents

- 2.29 Whilst acknowledging that communication and consultation issues will be considered in more detail during the course of the Board’s Inquiry, the working group noted the earlier and ongoing communication and consultation work with local residents, as set out in section 5 of the Director’s report. In acknowledging the work carried out, particular importance was placed on holding and attending regular forum meetings and the working group was pleased to note that the EASEL Team have, and will continue to, attend regular local resident group meetings.

- 2.30 The working group noted that the Neighbourhood Planning work is the first key part of the process that will bring all partners to the table. In view of this, importance was placed on ensuring that sites are not planned without adequate community consultation with the aim of reaching a general consensus from local people on such plans.
- 2.31 The working group was informed that City development led on the previous consultation as this was part of the strategic planning process to meet government requirements. However, it was acknowledged that during the consultation process, there had been some misinterpretations of the plans which had led to confusion. The working group was therefore pleased to note that the EASEL Team in Regeneration would be involved in jointly carrying out future consultation processes with City Development to ensure that what is sent out reflects the issues set out as part of the neighbourhood planning process.
- 2.32 In relation to the consultation process, the working group sought clarification of the appointment of the consultation provider for the EASEL project. In response, it was explained that the Council is in the process of tendering for an urban designer for the project and intends to make both of these appointments together.

Adopting a one Council approach

- 2.33 The working group emphasised the importance of services not working in individual silos and adopting a 'One Council' approach towards delivering the EASEL project.
- 2.24 It was noted that whilst there are core elements that the Council can manage, the Council is unable to control issues around education and health. In view of this, the working group was informed that the contributions of partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors are being, and will continue to be, deployed through partnership working arrangements with the aim of getting all partners to prioritise the objectives of the EASEL project within their own services.
- 2.35 The working group questioned whether there was a senior officer group overseeing the project process and noted the role of the Programme Board which was established to work up the detail of the plans for the programme.
- 2.36 It was acknowledged that a lot depends on what happens outside of the Council too and that the coordination of these different inputs is very time consuming and needs careful negotiation.
- 2.37 In view of this, the working group questioned whether a deadline had been given to other services and partners. In response it was highlighted a deadline would be firmed up once the urban designers were in place, but that services are aware of what is expected from them and therefore should be anticipating this deadline to be set shortly.

- 2.38 In terms of Member involvement, importance was placed on having open discussions between Members and officers and it was noted that Ward Members were now being consulted regularly on progress with the EASEL project. In order to carry the projects momentum and stability in the longer term, the working group acknowledged the importance of having a cross-party consensus and support for the EASEL project.