

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

Summary report of the working group meeting held on 15th October 2009.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 A working group of the Board met on 15th October 2009 to consider evidence in line with the Board's ongoing Inquiry into the East and South East Leeds (EASEL) Regeneration Project.

1.2 The purpose of this meeting was to receive an update on the EASEL programme with particular focus around the approach to community consultation and engagement. The working group considered a report from the Chief Regeneration Officer which provided a programme update and details of consultations carried out with people living in the EASEL area, as well as setting out the future use of community consultation as part of a neighbourhood planning process. This report is attached as Appendix A.

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 D Hollingsworth
- Councillor G Hyde
- 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

Funding support for the construction of new housing

2.1 At the time of the working group meeting, officers were able to confirm that the bid put forward by the Council and partners to the Homes and Communities Agency as part of the Round 1 Kickstart Housing Delivery Programme had been successful. Such funding will be directed at three schemes within Leeds, two of which are in the EASEL area and will equate to a further 108 units along with the 60 units already secured through EASEL Affordable Housing (Chevin Housing Association).

The impact of the recession on the EASEL programme

- 2.2 It was reported to the working group that the recession, particularly its effect on the housing market, has required a review of the overall approach to delivering investment in the city. As funding sources for development have been squeezed, developers across the board are reassessing their investment strategies. Consequently this has led to the need for a revised approach to neighbourhood planning for the EASEL programme.
- 2.3 Members were reminded that following changes to planning legislation, the Unitary Development Plan for Leeds will be replaced by a Local Development Framework and City Development will be responsible for the development of a number of Area Action Plans (AAP) looking at land available for housing, greenspace, employment and infrastructure.
- 2.4 The AAP will set the spatial plan for the EASEL area providing the broad brush approach to change in the area. One of its key functions is to identify areas of change and make allocations of land for types of development for future planning applications. 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". This 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.
- 2.5 As part of the ongoing development of the Area Action Plan, Members noted that City Development had recently conducted consultation on changes to the AAP since the preferred options consultation in 2007. However, faced with the existing challenge of working within a completely different economic climate where delivery models dependent on raising funding from land sales and speculative property development are no longer considered viable in the short to medium term, the working group noted that the Council and its partners have been forced to radically rethink its plans for bringing investment into the EASEL area. For these reasons, it was noted that the timing and scope of the neighbourhood planning exercise and resultant community consultation is now under review.
- 2.6 Whilst the working group acknowledged that the neighbourhood planning process would need to reflect realistic goals in light of the current economic climate, Members raised concern that any further delays in conducting planned community consultation could further fuel the negative perceptions surrounding the programme that appear to exist within some EASEL communities as residents begin to feel more and more disengaged.
- 2.7 The working group emphasised the importance of community consultation in providing a real opportunity for the council and its partners to explain to the public that whilst the recession may have forced the council to reassess the overall direction of the EASEL programme, they can remain confident that the EASEL programme will continue to be a priority and that the council is

committed to ensuring that there is adequate and effective community involvement in shaping the regeneration plans in neighbourhoods in the EASEL area.

The need for ongoing communication with communities within the EASEL area

- 2.8 In anticipation of future planned community consultation, the working group emphasised the need for ongoing communication with communities within the EASEL area and were informed about the range of consultation methods used in connection with the EASEL regeneration programme. These include:
- organised community consultation events contributing to the selection of preferred EASEL partner
 - reports and attendance at Area Committees and their forums;
 - regular attendance at a variety of residents groups;
 - liaison and attendance at board meetings for East North East Homes Ltd;
 - consultation by East North East Homes Ltd on their housing management and declared clearance areas;
 - exhibitions and surveys at community events such as galas;
 - a community newsletter for EASEL residents;
 - a website providing background information on the programme.
- 2.9 Whilst recognising the benefits of strengthening the communication links with the public, the working group also acknowledged the existing challenge of promoting such publicity with a limited amount of resource. Emphasis was therefore placed on utilising existing resources more effectively. Members noted that closer working arrangements between the Regeneration Team and Area Management Team were being explored in order to try and utilise existing communication links with the local communities. In view of this, the working group agreed to invite the Area Manager to the next session of the Board's inquiry.

The need for greater recognition and awareness of existing initiatives and schemes which are part of the EASEL regeneration programme.

- 2.10 During session one of the Board's inquiry in April 2009, Members emphasised the importance of services not working in individual silos and adopting a 'One Council' approach towards delivering the EASEL project. At that time, 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 Scrutiny Board 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.

- 2.11 The working group noted that whilst improvements have been made since April 2009, one of the key issues now raised is the need to associate relevant investment initiatives and schemes with the overall EASEL regeneration programme. The working group was informed that whilst there has been a huge amount of investment targeted within the EASEL area, either in the form of a new school building, health centre or retail development, the public generally do not associate such investments as being part of the EASEL programme.
- 2.12 In view of this, the working group emphasised the need for greater recognition and awareness of where existing initiatives and schemes have arisen as part of the overall EASEL regeneration programme and suggested that perhaps the development of an EASEL 'branding' may assist in providing this recognition.