

Scrutiny Interim Report

East and South East Leeds Regeneration Programme

Scrutiny Board
(Environment and Neighbourhoods)
May 2010



Introduction and Scope

Introduction

1. In January 2004, the Executive Board received its first report on the proposal for the regeneration of the East and South East of Leeds. Covering the communities of Harehills, Gipton, Seacroft, Halton Moor, Osmonthorpe and Richmond Hill, this was recognised as an ambitious and multi faceted regeneration programme which set out to utilise the assets held by the Council, capture the expertise of the private sector and develop a vehicle which could maximise the generation of resources for the benefit of the area.
2. In view of such a large scale programme, each key stage has been reported to the Executive Board for approval. Since January 2004, the Executive Board has received numerous progress reports and continues to monitor the developments of the EASEL programme.
3. However, in February 2009, the Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) received a request for a Scrutiny inquiry to be undertaken into the EASEL regeneration programme following concerns that there had been delays in progress with the programme and that people living in the EASEL area were not being kept informed of what was happening.
4. In consideration of this request, the Board agreed to conduct an inquiry which focuses around the process arrangements in place for the EASEL programme and explores the opportunities available to the Council and its partners for communicating effectively about the programme with all

the key stakeholders, and particularly the people living in the EASEL area.

Scope of the Inquiry

5. Terms of reference for this Inquiry were agreed in March 2009 with the understanding that this inquiry would continue into the 2009/10 municipal year.
6. The main focus of the Inquiry was around identifying opportunities for strengthening communication links with key stakeholders and the EASEL communities about the programme. However, as part of the scope, particular attention was also given to the development of the neighbourhood planning process.
7. The neighbourhood planning process is made up of two elements; a technical exercise through which site development options and local infrastructure proposals are 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.
8. As the neighbourhood planning work is the first key part of the process which brings all partners to the table, we recognised the importance of ensuring that sites are not planned without adequate community consultation with the aim of reaching a general consensus from local people on such plans.
9. However, since session one of our inquiry in April 2009, when we received an overview of the initial programme objectives and timeline, we have



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observed a significant shift in direction for the EASEL programme in light of the current economic climate.

10. In October 2009, we learned 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, and housing sales have fallen dramatically, developers across the board are reassessing their investment strategies.
11. 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, we acknowledge that the Council and its partners have been forced to radically rethink its plans for bringing investment into the EASEL area. Consequently the timing and scope of the neighbourhood planning exercise and resultant community consultation remains under review.
12. As the main focus of our Inquiry was around strengthening communication links with key stakeholders and the EASEL communities about the programme, we believe that this is even more relevant now that the recession has forced the Council to reassess the overall direction of the EASEL programme.
13. Whilst we do plan to continue with our inquiry and monitor progress with the EASEL programme through to the neighbourhood planning stage, we considered it appropriate to produce an interim report setting out our findings and recommendations at this stage.
14. Whilst acknowledging the current difficulty in predicting the financial implications of our recommendations, we do acknowledge that any resource implications will need to be taken into consideration, particularly during this period of decreasing public funding.
15. However, our recommendations were formulated to assist the Council and its partners to move forward and provide assurance to the relevant stakeholders and the EASEL communities that the programme will remain a priority and that there will be effective community involvement in shaping the regeneration plans in neighbourhoods in the EASEL area
16. This echoes the message presented to the Executive Board in March 2010 when reviewing changes to the Local Development Scheme and Area Action Plan programme. In agreeing to formally withdraw the EASEL Area Action Plan, it was also made very clear that this should not be seen as signalling any weakening of the Council's commitment to the regeneration of the EASEL area, but to acknowledge the need to develop more informal neighbourhood planning frameworks for individual communities rather than the area as a whole.



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Acknowledging the impact of the current economic climate

17. The EASEL programme is the Council's most significant area based regeneration programme commitment to date. However, as a model dependent on raising funding from land sales and speculative property development, the current economic climate has inevitably led the Council to review the overall direction of the programme as investment funding for speculative developments in the EASEL area is proving very difficult to attract and sustain in the foreseeable future.

18. Whilst we accept that the neighbourhood planning process would need to reflect realistic goals in light of the economic climate, we are conscious that 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.

19. It is vital that the Council and its partners maintain communication links with communities to assure them that, whilst the recession may have forced the Council to reassess the overall direction of the EASEL programme, it will remain a priority of the Council and there will be adequate and effective community involvement in shaping the regeneration plans in neighbourhoods in the EASEL area.

20. To achieve this effectively, we recognise the need to improve the coordination of all communication links with

stakeholders and the public to ensure that accurate and consistent messages about the EASEL programme are being delivered. We have addressed this in more detail below.

Developing consistent and coordinated communication links

21. During our inquiry, we were informed about the wide range of methods that have been used to engage with local stakeholders and communities around the EASEL regeneration programme, which have included the following:

- 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.

22. Whilst we acknowledge the amount of effort that has been invested in such engagement work, we are concerned



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that there appears to be some communities within the EASEL area that still feel a sense of detachment from the whole process.

23. We are also conscious that where communities have been actively engaged in such a wide range of consultation and engagement processes, there is the potential danger of them receiving varying messages from a variety of different sources thereby resulting in confusion about the programme.
24. In view of this, we believe there is merit in reviewing the current EASEL Communications and Involvement Framework to ensure that accurate and consistent messages about the EASEL programme are being communicated effectively to all stakeholders and communities.
25. As part of this review, particular attention needs to be given to improving communication links with staff; local stakeholders and partners; and local communities. We would also advise that the review addresses the need for a clear shared understanding of what is described as 'the community' or 'communities' in the area.
26. We acknowledge the important role that many frontline staff have in liaising with the public and regard them very much as ambassadors for the EASEL programme. It is therefore vital that such staff are better informed about what the Council is trying to achieve and advised of recent developments with the programme to ensure that a consistent message is being delivered.
27. To maintain commitment from partners and local stakeholders, they too need to be kept better informed of recent developments and made aware of their particular roles within the overall programme.
28. Whilst recognising the clear benefits of strengthening communication links with local communities, we also acknowledge the existing challenge of promoting such publicity with a limited amount of resource. More emphasis should therefore be placed upon utilising existing resources more effectively.
29. In particular, there is now the opportunity to strengthen links between the Regeneration Team and Area Management Team to utilise existing mechanisms for communicating with local communities more effectively.
30. Such joined up working should also encourage the development of more innovative and non-traditional engagement methods, such as road show events, which we believe help to break down communication barriers by providing a less formal environment in which to engage with members of the public. We would therefore support that such methods are developed further as part of the review process.
31. In recognising the valuable role of Ward Members in providing knowledge and advice about how to engage effectively with their local communities, we strongly recommend that they are also actively involved in the review process .
32. We would also support the nomination of an appropriate body to lead on the review, ensuring that all communication links are coordinated effectively and



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avoiding duplication of effort. Such a body should also act as the single point of contact for communicating the most up-to-date developments with the EASEL programme. We believe that the current EASEL Regeneration Team would be the most appropriate body to take on this leading role.

Recommendation 1

(i) That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods ensures that the current EASEL Communications and Involvement Framework is reviewed in order to:

- **Improve links with staff, stakeholders, partners and communities**
- **Improve co-ordination and avoid duplication of effort**
- **Provide a single point of contact for communicating the most up-to-date developments within the EASEL Programme**

(ii) That the EASEL Regeneration Team leads on this review and works closely with Ward Members to agree recommendations to be brought back to Scrutiny at the earliest opportunity

Strengthening partnership working and adopting a 'One Council' approach

33. It is vital that all services within the Council recognise themselves as part of a 'team' responsible for addressing the pressing needs of our most deprived neighbourhoods. Whilst not wishing to undermine the structures already in place for overseeing the delivery of the EASEL programme, we believe that further work is still needed to instil a duty of cooperation from all Council services to deliver the objectives of the Council's number one priority regeneration programme.
34. Whilst there are core elements of the EASEL regeneration programme that the Council can manage, we acknowledge that a lot also depends on what happens outside of the Council too and that the coordination of these different inputs can be very time consuming and requires careful negotiation.
35. However, the commitment and contribution of other key partners, such as NHS Leeds, the Police, Job Centre Plus and others remains a key component in delivering regeneration within the EASEL area.
36. Faced with challenges presented by the current economic climate, it is paramount that all partners continue to work together and prioritise the objectives of the EASEL programme within their own services.



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37. Through the EASEL Steering Group and Programme Board, it is vital that the Council continues to promote and progress with the EASEL programme as its number one regeneration priority.

Recommendation 2

- (i) That the Executive Board instils a duty of co-operation from all Council services to deliver the objectives of the EASEL Programme as a One Council Team.**
- (ii) That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods leads on producing an action plan to ensure that the EASEL Programme is being delivered on a One Council basis by a One Council Team**
- (iii) That this action plan is brought back to Scrutiny by November 2010.**

Recommendation 3

That, through the EASEL Steering Group and Programme Board, the Council continues to promote and progress with the EASEL programme as its number one regeneration priority.

Greater recognition of existing EASEL initiatives and schemes

38. One of the key issues raised during our inquiry was the need to associate relevant investment initiatives and schemes with the overall EASEL regeneration programme.

39. We understand 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.

40. In view of this, there is a need for greater recognition and awareness of where existing initiatives and schemes have arisen as part of the overall EASEL regeneration programme and we would suggest that the development of an EASEL 'branding' may assist in providing this recognition.

Recommendation 4

That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods explores appropriate methods for generating greater recognition and awareness of where existing initiatives and schemes have arisen as part of the overall EASEL regeneration programme and reports back to Scrutiny by November 2010.



Monitoring arrangements

Standard arrangements for monitoring the outcome of the Board's recommendations will apply.

The decision-makers to whom the recommendations are addressed will be asked to submit a formal response to the recommendations, including an action plan and timetable, normally within two months.

Following this the Scrutiny Board will determine any further detailed monitoring, over and above the standard quarterly monitoring of all scrutiny recommendations.

Reports and Publications Submitted

- Report of the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods on the East and South East Leeds Regeneration Programme. 6th April 2009.
- Report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development presenting a summary report of the working group meeting held on 6th April 2009. 11th May 2009.
- Report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development presenting a summary report of the working group meeting held on 15th October 2009. 9th November 2009.

Background Papers:

Previous reports to Executive Board:

21/01/2004	East and south east Leeds regeneration proposals
21/07/2004	East & South East Leeds Regeneration Area: - Selection Procedure For Preferred Development Partner
15/11/2004	East & South East Leeds Regeneration Area: Selection Procedure For Preferred Regeneration Partner Further Report
29/06/2005	EASEL Regeneration Area Procurement for Preferred Bidder
14/12/2005	EASEL: Outcome of the Exclusive Clarification Period with Bellway
14/12/2005	East and South East Leeds Regeneration Area land assembly issues associated with the phase one development sites
05/07/2006	EASEL: Outcome of the Phase 1 Strategic Development Agreement negotiations with Bellway PLC.
20/09/2006	EASEL Regeneration Project Update
09/02/2007	East and South East Leeds Regeneration Area
04/04/2007	East And South East Leeds (Easel) Regeneration Area – Outcome of Additional Negotiation Period
13/06/2007	EASEL AAP preferred options report
05/11/2008	EASEL Joint Venture Partnership



Witnesses Heard

- Stephen Boyle, Chief Regeneration Officer
- Peter Anderson Beck, Head of the East Office, EASEL and Aire Valley Leeds Regeneration
- Maggie Gjessing, Senior Programme Manager, EASEL
- Rory Barke, North East Leeds Area Manager

Dates of Scrutiny

16th March 2009 – Scrutiny Board Meeting (agreed terms of reference)
6th April 2009 – Working Group Meeting
11th May 2009 – Scrutiny Board Meeting
15th October 2009 – Working Group Meeting
9th November 2009 – Scrutiny Board Meeting
30th November 2009 – Working Group Meeting

Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods)
Inquiry into the EASEL Regeneration Project
May 2010
Report author: Angela Brogden



www.scrutiny.unit@leeds.gov.uk