

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

29 NOVEMBER 2011

Present :- Councillor Andrew Ellis (Chairman)
Councillors Nigel Chapman, Nick Cope, Bill Frame,
Theresa Higgins, Kim Naish, Will Quince, Colin Sykes
and Dennis Willetts

Substitute Member :- Councillor Philip Oxford for Councillor Gerard Oxford

Also in Attendance :- Councillor Lyn Barton
Councillor Nick Barlow
Councillor Henry Spyvee
Councillor Anne Turrell

20. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on the 11 October 2011 and 25 October 2011 were both confirmed as a correct record.

Councillor Kim Naish (in respect of being a former business owner in the St Botolphs area) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

21. Review the Council's ongoing regeneration programme for St Botolphs Quarter in the Town Centre

Councillor Lyn Barton, Portfolio Holder for Renaissance, Ms. Lindsay Barker, Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration and Ms. Fiona Duhamel, Regeneration Programme Manager all attended the meeting for this item, a review of the progress of the Council's investment in the St Botolph's regeneration project.

Councillor Barton introduced the review of the St Botolphs Quarter regeneration review saying the presentation would provide members with an update on the individual projects within the St Botolph's regeneration project. Councillor Barton said the regeneration continued at pace despite the continued economic downturn. Councillor Barton mentioned the Better Town Centre Programme that allowed the St Botolph's project to be seen in a wider context, providing a linkage to other adjoining areas and projects.

Presentation

Ms. Duhamel said the St Botolph Quarter (SBQ) regeneration project formed part of the Better Town Centre Programme (BTCP) that was set up eighteen months ago. The BTCP has nine themes with all regeneration projects in the town centre linked through these themes.

Progress on the individual parts of regeneration within the SBQ are as follows;

Greyfriars - Planning consent had been granted for Greyfriars to be converted to a 40 bedroom boutique hotel, providing refurbishment to a key heritage building and providing a much needed hotel to the SBQ and wider town centre.

East Hill House – The house is to be converted to a fine dining restaurant. Planning and English Heritage discussions are ongoing with a planning application due in the spring of 2012 and a final legal agreement for the transfer of land adjacent to Lewis Gardens underway to Scott Developments.

Queen Street hotel and retail units – There are plans for a 97 bed hotel and 9,000 square feet of retail units. The legal process is underway and due for completion by December 2012. The Planning Application is due this coming January, with demolition in the summer of 2012 and completion and opening of hotel in November 2013. This development will be achieved with £8m of private sector investment.

Public Realm including Berryfield Park – A new public square has been created that provides improved pedestrian links, improved soft landscaping, with important green space brought back into use. The total cost of £1.7m has been funded mainly through external monies. This work was completed in July 2011.

Creative Business Centre – The Old Police Station was acquired in 2010 for redevelopment as the Creative Business Centre. The redevelopment will be a significant task due to the state of the building and an ongoing process initially using European funding secured and growth point monies. There has been a significant demand for space from the sector even before the buildings are complete and work continues on a management strategy for this building and the public realm.

Magistrates Court – Works are due to complete at the end of March 2012. This has been a £30m investment by the Courts Service, with the new courts replacing those which currently exist in Harwich and Colchester.

St Botolph's Priory – 2010 saw the creation of an accessible footpath from Priory Street to Britannia Car Park, with activity space, a relocated war memorial and new tree planting and seating areas all funded by growth point monies.

Town Station Square – A Planning application will be submitted in December 2011, with work due to start on site in February 2012. This development will be funded entirely through S106 monies, with the new square to be managed by the train operator.

Vineyard Gate – Discussions are ongoing with developers regarding a smaller scheme which is more viable in the current economic climate. The proposed scheme does not include Osborne Street Car Park or Gala Bingo. Ms. Duhamel said once more information on this scheme becomes available it would be presented to Cabinet.

Historic Town Centre Improvements – This scheme is a joint Essex County Council and Colchester Borough Council traffic management scheme to consider the removal of unnecessary traffic and improve the pedestrian and cycle experience. The aim is to provide more reliable public transport for residents and visitors and imminent Traffic Regulation Orders will provide for buses, taxis, cycles and motorcycles only in North

Hill and High Street. Improvements to bus stops and flags was completed in 2011, and the scheme will be funded with an initial £550,000 of monies coming from Haven Gateway Growth Point.

Osborne Street Bus Station – The detailed design work is ongoing to ensure the relocation of the bus station from the existing site to Osborne Street. Testing has proven successful and there is positive dialogue with the bus operators. The works are scheduled to be completed by the autumn 2012.

Future Projects – Feasibility work continues in respect of potential housing sites such as Britannia Car Park, phase 2 of the Queen Street Hotel and retail outlets development area including plans for new homes and a new European funding bid Agora, is being prepared for submission in January 2012 which seeks to revitalise the independent shopping areas in the town.

General discussion

Councillor Willets thanked officers for an interesting presentation. In response to Councillor Willets enquiry about the 2005 Master Plan, Ms. Duhamel said the current regeneration programme had not moved significantly away from the Master Plan. The creative quarter was still taking place, but in bite size chunks due to the economic downturn. Smaller projects are being achieved. Ms. Duhamel said the Master Plan did not have timescales and therefore it is difficult to monitor progress in terms of time. A Project Management List is maintained and managed by the Regeneration team.

Ms Barker said car parking was a future issue, with a number of Council services working together to provide solutions. Essex County Council with CBC will model parking and patterns, and the information will identify under use as well as parking pressures. The new park and ride scheme will be an important factor in reducing town centre traffic, alleviating town centre parking, and the redeveloped town centre railway station and the Hythe Station was allowing more people to access the town centre by train. The area behind the Magistrates Court could, if proven to be viable, provide a car park opportunity and is being considered but will only be taken forward if sufficient demand. Cllr Lyn Barton said there was a delicate balance in reducing congestion, whilst encouraging local people and visitors to access the town centre in different ways. Improved parking, public transport and access to other forms of travel will all help achieve this aim.

Ms. Duhamel said the town centre improvements are about making the area a vibrant and pleasant area to visit and access other areas of the town centre. In regards to Queen Street / St Botolphs Street, whilst it was accepted that only the east side would benefit directly from the regeneration of the SBQ, over a period of time the improved area should bring about wider changes. As the SBQ becomes more active and vibrant the owners of businesses to the west side will see the benefits to redeveloping and revitalising this side of both streets, with some changes already underway.

Councillor Frame thanked officers for the presentation that helped enormously in understanding the whole project and defining the area. Councillor Frame asked that ward councillors would be involved at future planning stages. In regards to the area of

the existing bus station, Ms. Duhamel said this would be divided into two parts, one (representing circa two thirds of the area) would be transformed into open space as part of an extension to Berryfield Park, and the second part (representing one third of the area) will form phase II of the SBQ development that is likely to include new residential and more shops. Ms. Duhamel also confirmed that she understood development of Greyfriars had currently paused whilst approval is sought for further minor alterations to the approved plans.

Councillor T.Higgins said ward members should be informed of changes and developments on regeneration. In response to Councillor Higgins, in respect to parking and public transport travel, Ms. Duhamel said for the foreseeable future there are no plans to change the use of the Priory Street Car Park other than making it an improved facility with better pedestrian access to the SBQ. Ms. Duhamel confirmed the Vineyard Car Park does form part of the redevelopment of this area. With regards to the Britannia Car Park, all options are to be considered in terms of access and future redevelopment.

Councillor Higgins made a plea for the residential and short-term parking in the St Johns Green area to be examined. Ms. Barker said she would pass Councillor Higgins comments to the Head of Street Services.

Councillor Chapman thanked officers for the excellent presentation. In response to Councillor Chapman in regards to pedestrian access from the south of Colchester to the SBQ / town centre, Ms. Duhamel said officers are working with Essex County Council, to provide proper links to these areas via an improved St Botolphs roundabout using money from S106 Garrison development funds. Ms. Duhamel confirmed that discussions are ongoing.

Ms. Barker responded to Councillor Chapman, explaining that officers are aware of the issues for the Priory Street Residents Association and in terms of Licensing, the 'stress area' around Priory Street. Officers are monitoring the busy 'Night Time Economy' areas such as around Priory Street and this is being fed into the overall plan of redevelopment.

Councillor Quince thanked officers for an excellent presentation. In response to Councillor Quince and in regards to Greyfriars, Ms. Duhamel said the Greyfriars car park development is in two parts. The largest part will remain a parking area, whilst the smaller car park will form annex facilities for the hotel in due course

In response to Councillor Sykes, Ms. Barker said firstsite was the catalyst for the redevelopment of the SBQ area, central to the regeneration. So far as hotels in the area, a comprehensive study of hotel capacity was undertaken and subsequently updated, and officers are absolutely confident the types of hotels being developed are what Colchester needs, and a significant way forward to meeting future capacity needs. Ms. Duhamel said developers have confirmed to them that firstsite was the reason for them investing in the area and its future potential. Ms. Duhamel said the Osborne Street/Stanwell St Bus Station would replace the existing bus station, with similar but improved facilities. It is then hoped over time with further funding being secured the facilities can be improved including with real time bus information

displayed around the town centre. Modelling confirmed that the new bus station area will cope with current and future bus movements, but Essex County Council will only close the current station once the new station is fully operational.

Councillor Ellis thanked officers for their excellent presentation, saying the discussions would help members feel more positive about the outcome of the regeneration of the SBQ, and asked officers to consider opening the presentation out to a broader session for all members.

RESOLVED that the Panel thanked Councillor Barton and officers for attending the meeting, providing an excellent presentation and for full and positive responses to questions from the Panel.

22. Work Programme

RESOLVED that the Panel considered and noted the Work Programme.