

Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Growth and Regeneration Scrutiny Commission



28 January 2021 at 5.30 pm

Members Present:-

Councillors: Paula O'Rourke (Chair), Fabian Breckels (Vice-Chair), Mark Bradshaw, Tom Brook, Martin Fodor, Kevin Quartley, Mark Wright and Tim Rippington

Officers in Attendance:-

Stephen Peacock (Executive Director for Growth and Regeneration), Nuala Gallagher (Director, City Growth, Investment & Infrastructure), Johanna Holmes (Policy Advisor - Scrutiny), James Anderson (Education Programme Manager) and Abigail Stratford (Service Manager, Major Projects); Jason Thorne (Senior Project Manager).

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The meeting was conducted via video conference.

The Chair welcomed everyone and asked each of the attendees to introduce themselves.

2. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies were received from:

- Councillor Carole Johnson
- Councillor Mark Weston: Councillor Graham Morris attended as a substitute

3. Declarations of Interest

In relation to the Item 11. Capital Strategic Partner, Councillor Bradshaw stated that he was a Director of Bristol Holding Ltd and Bristol Heat Network Ltd.

4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Action Sheet

- The minutes of the previous meetings held on 14th September 2020 and the Extraordinary meeting on the 6th January 2021 were approved as a correct record.



- It was noted with regards to the minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting on the 6th January 2021 that the name of the Bristol Disability and Equality Forum representative should read as Laura Welti.
- Members noted the progress on the Action Sheet.
 - o It was noted that an action had read as: Officers agreed to provide further information about all housing delivery data compared with previously forecast figures for the same period after the meeting. This had not been included on the action sheet, but a response would therefore be requested from officers.

5. Chair's Business

There was no Chair's Business on this occasion.

6. Public Forum

Public Forum questions and statements were published prior to the meeting and can be viewed [here](#).

Supplementary questions were responded to during the meeting.

A Member said they were alarmed by some of the points that David Redgewell had raised in his statement, particularly that the West of England Combined Authority had not yet been set up a strategic transport authority. Members discussed whether there was something the Commission could do to speed this process up.

7. Temple Quarter Member Working Group - Chairs Report

Councillor Beech - Cabinet Member with responsibility for Spatial Planning and City Design introduced the Report and highlighted that the Working Group was still at its 'embryonic' stage and had met for the first time only very recently. She said it had been a positive first session where many of the key issues had been talked through but there was a lot to do and many of the projects were very complex.

The Chair highlighted a public forum question submitted by Suzanne Audrey that asked if Members were "confident that arrangements for audit and scrutiny of the plans for Temple Quarter and Temple Island do not repeat the problems of poor access to information, poor record keeping, lack of transparency, and an inappropriate balance between legal and commercial sensitivities?". The Chair confirmed that the minutes of the meetings would be kept on record and the Group would report to Cabinet. The Group's meetings were closed because the work was at such an early stage.

Councillor Beech added that the role of scrutiny was about achieving better outcomes for the City and that was therefore the aim of the Group. She said that a full consultation process would happen and there would be many public meetings in the future.

Members were generally pleased that there was scrutiny and Member involvement in the regeneration of Temple Island and Temple Quarter.

A Member said they did have some doubts about the long-term prospects of the Temple Island Plan.

Also, in the City Centre Plan Report on the meeting agenda had said to his surprise that the property market for office space was buoyant and yet various other reports state that rents for office space were



tumbling and set to tumble further. He said the Council was potentially taking a large risk on this and that he trusted that the group would dig into this point and not take the information at face value. At this point the Chair asked officers to introduce the Temple Island - Position Statement.

8. Temple Island - Position Statement

The Executive Director responded to the above Member question by saying that the position Bristol is current in is very different to that of London where residential property prices are down by 10%. But that was not the case in Bristol. He said no one was pretending that Covid hadn't changed things or has fully played out in terms of what might happen with regards to working patterns. Developers were currently grappling with the potential changes about whether people still want to live and work in cities. He said there was still 18 months to make decisions on this but if it looked less favourable due to the market going in a different direction then further conversations would be had. But the prospect of having a conversation about that aspect of the deal had always been there.

The Director added that if the deal had been complete officers would have asked L&G representatives to attend the meeting. He said the deal was complex and there were constraints on such things as ground surveys and infrastructure. They had appointed a legal consultant for the enabling works so they could begin. There had been delays but they would come back to the Commission with L&G representatives when the deal had been signed.

A Member stated he was concerned the paper said it was only 'to note'. The Chair said she requested something in writing to explain the situation rather than just remove the item from the agenda because the contracts hadn't been signed. The paper was to explain the current situation and was judged to be better than not publishing anything at all.

9. Western Harbour Update

The Council's Head of Regeneration provided Members with a summary of the published report. She said that an early engagement process in 2019 had taken place to look at the road network around Western Harbour. Since then the Council has been in conversation with the Western Harbour Advisory Group (WHAG) and the approach the Council was taking now was to take a step back and use some time this year to solely focus on engagement for the next stage of the project. Officers want to take an inclusive, collaborative and creative approach and to listen and hear the voices of residents, businesses, other stakeholders and the wider City. The aim of that approach is to create a co-produced vision for Western Harbour which would set out what type of place it could become in future. That vision will then unpin any future design work for the next phase for the area. She then went on to explain how the proposal was to undertake a procurement process for urban design work that would facilitate the creative engagement process and place-shaping vision.

There would also be pop-up events to speak to people across the city.

Members asked for further information about the benefits and themes that had arisen from officers meeting with WHAG. Officers said the themes were from the original engagement work and the conversations provided opportunities to hear first-hand what was important to people and what concerns



they had. The meetings had provided opportunities to learn and reflect on where the project needed to go next.

Members commented that the process officers described was positive but there was a lot of work to do to gain trust back from the local community and were not sure why the Council hadn't used this approach from the very beginning.

Some Members also said that they agreed with the public forum statements about re-naming the area 'Western Harbour'. It was suggested this had potentially alienated the local community from the beginning because it was not a name that people associated with the area and it had not been discussed. Officers said if there was strong feedback from the community about the name that would be reviewed. Another Member said they also liked the approaches officers were now outlining but in their view this was two years too late. Also, with regards to the 'vision' it wasn't clear what was now on or off the table so to speak.

Members asked who the key groups were that had been identified that would be involved going forward. Officers said they would be working with target audiences and would share that information with Members. **ACTION:** further information about target audiences to be shared with members.

Another Member said they also liked a lot of what had been described by officers including that no options were currently preferred. However, the previous Cabinet Report it was said had expressed a preference for Option E and that needed to be rescinded. He concurred with an earlier point made that it was not clear if some things that had previously been ruled out were still ruled out.

Another Member agreed what had been said was positive and he hoped the damage that had been done could be repaired. He asked about the role of councillors in the process. Officers said that councillor input was very welcome and they believed they had an important role to play including ensuring that the Council was engaging with the correct people in the community.

The Chair stated that it was her view that the Advisory Board should include local councillors, and this should be re-looked at going forward. It would be a democratic deficit if they were not involved and she would therefore make enquiries about this.

ACTION: for the Chair to raise councillor representation on the Advisory Board with the relevant people.

The Commission thanked officers for their time.

10 City Centre Development & Delivery Plan

The Senior Project Manager introduced the item to Members and stated that Covid-19 had had a major impact on the City Centre but the Council was continuing to work with consultants to take to the work to the next stage. This was a long-term project that would likely take ten to fifteen years to complete. The City Centre had experienced many of the impacts of Covid restrictions such as a reduction in the number of shoppers, workers, students and tourists. Officers took Members through the published information on footfall figures which they said demonstrated continued consumer demand because footfall figures were only slightly down year on year. However, it was said that Covid may have accelerated existing trends of online and out of town shopping. Many people had changed their ways of working and this could potentially lead to some vacancies in office space in the Centre.



A Member said that there were still lots of shops where the activity is only on the ground floor and other floors were left vacant. Also, that the City centre Debenhams building would soon also be vacant. What do officers think might happen to it?

Councillor Beech said that the rules on converting commercial spaces to residential spaces were being relaxed but the challenge was the lack of commercial will when it came to vertical mixing of spaces. The question was more about what needed to be done to encourage more commercial property owners to unlock vacant spaces. It was also highlighted that there were some good examples where this was working in the City such as East Street in Bedminster and Old Market. She added that it wasn't always the case that planning regulations were blocking changes, some buildings were run down and required considerable investment. Yes, the closure of Debenhams did pose key questions about the future of city centres. But in her view it was yet to be understood if this was an acceleration of trends.

A Member asked about the Development and Delivery Plan (DPP) that would be presented to Cabinet in Spring 2022 and asked if it could come to scrutiny before that for Members to feed into? It was agreed that a small group could be set up or scrutiny could do a 'deep-dive' when the time was right.

Another Member commented that nothing like the current Covid situation had been seen like this in the retail sector before. This had in his view accelerated the existing trends in retail and he agreed with earlier comments that there was a need to plan for a less retail dominated City Centre in future and this was as an opportunity to create more homes there.

The Chair asked Members for their views on when they wanted this to come back to scrutiny. For example, did they want to wait until the DDP was complete before it was brought back to the Commission?

Officers said they were challenging themselves on the pace of the work. There were two key pieces of work they were looking to accelerate; one was the infrastructure and feasibility work around St James Barton roundabout and also the vision for Castle Park. Perhaps officers and Members could agree outside of the meeting when would be appropriate to come back in perhaps a staged update as the projects evolve and materialise? The Chair agreed it would be valuable for officers to return to scrutiny in the coming months.

Councillor Beech agreed to this approach and said Scrutiny were welcome to make the requests about which aspects they were particularly interested in.

The Chair thanked Councillor Beech and Officers and said she would give this some thought because it was such a big and crucial topic. She added that Members were very aware of the challenges ahead.

11 Capital Strategic Partner

The Executive Director - Growth & Regeneration introduced the report to Members. He said this was a culmination of a long-term piece of work. The aim of this was allow the Council to mobilise and scale-up where the Council has decided to do a major piece of work around a capital project. The Council had been failing to deliver its Capital Programme for several years now. The Grant Thornton Report referred to earlier in the meeting had made it clear that needed to change and so this was a new approach to allow the Council to become more agile.



The Head of Capital Projects took Members through the published slide deck which included the vision, rationale and strategic aims and timeline for the partnership. It was said the project was on target to be fully operational by July 2021.

This was an exciting opportunity for the Council and they were pleased to announced that the contract had been signed earlier in the day with ARCADIS who would be working in partnership with ARUP and Mott Macdonald and a number of other companies as part a further supply chain.

The Strategic Partner would ensure that the most effective and efficient resourcing, funding and delivery model is offered to the Council at all times. The volume of anticipated work was estimated at £20m over seven years but the Council had not guaranteed specific volumes of work.

The Director added that not all the projects would be new projects. There were already five to six existing projects ready to be delivered but this new partnership meant a cultural change for the council in the way they would be delivered.

The Chair agreed this was an important development in how the Council delivers capital projects going forward. She also said she hoped this would provide a replacement to the 'problem' of the number of consultants that the Council employs on daily rates.

A Member asked about the percentage of the total costs of projects that would be delivered via this partnership over the seven years of the contract, adding that £20m did not sound that much in terms of the Council's capital projects spend. The Director said this was a new way of working for the City Council and this was a strategic relationship but it was not exclusive. There was no minimum amount but the maximum figure had been set by procurement rules. One of the key differences was the Strategic Programme Director: James Halse who was now effectively part of the Extended Leadership Team.

A Member said he could see this was a major benefit for the Council but asked what was in it for big consultancies because it would now seem they are offering their services at a lower rate. Did it now potentially reduce the pool of consultants the Council could work with? The Director re-stated that there were no contractual obligations and said that the governance of the contract shouldn't be underestimated and the first 100 days would be important to embed this new way of working and see if they have got this partnership right. If it's right it will be a win-win situation for both parties.

Another Member agreed that the delivery of capital projects in the City needed to change but asked about how the costs and benefits would be measured? The Director said this would be done via the Audit Committee and the key performance indicators (KPIs) that Members receive via performance information every quarter. The Capital Partner was also providing the Council with a better resource and a clearer view of how it uses those resources as well as getting full value now. The value in terms of costs would be monitored throughout the length of the contract. If the Council did not think it was getting good value it was still within its rights to go elsewhere.

Members asked if this partnership could lead to review of internal services such as procurement. The Director responded by saying this was a good question, but they were not building a parallel system. The starting point was to work within the system that already exists and learn from the external partners.

This was an opportunity to really improve how the Council operates and delivers large projects.

The Commission thanked the Officers for their time.

12 Performance Report Quarter 2 - For Information

The Commission noted the report.



13 Work Programme

The work programme was noted.

Meeting ended at 7.55 pm

CHAIR _____

