

I am submitting this statement in my capacity as Chair of the Growth and Regeneration Scrutiny Commission. Whilst I have obtained support in principle from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board to send this statement, I have not, due to tight time constraints, had the opportunity to seek formal sign off.

The purpose of this statement is to describe how opportunities to involve Scrutiny in the disposal of Temple Island were missed and to urge the Administration to allow for better oversight in the future.

I recently looked back at the Temple Island item in the July cabinet paper and noted an appendix which posed four options for the disposal of the land; auction it off, go through the procurement process, do a joint venture, or engage in a strategic partnership, which was the choice already made.

That choice was made by very few people; the Mayor is the Council lead on that Cabinet paper, with Colin Molton as the executive director lead. I don't know how many of the Cabinet members were involved in the decision about the route taken to dispose of the land. I do know that no Scrutiny members were involved at that stage because it was not put on the work programme.

I think this was a missed opportunity.

The decision to dismiss the three options and go for the strategic partnership with Legal and General, one assumes, was made on grounds that were defensible at Scrutiny, so why did the Administration not take Scrutiny members with them on their decision-making journey?

Now that I have finally seen the papers and had some opportunity to question officers and advisors, I am aware of the arguments leading to the choice made. There is nothing improper in the actions taken and the risks, although high, are defended, and the risks of alternative routes have been explained.

However, the details are understood by very few of the Scrutiny Commission, as there was no time allowed for a proper scrutiny meeting. That is a concern to me; a very important and very complex deal is being done with very few people really understanding the risks.

Perhaps, more importantly, the opportunity for members to discuss and have their say on what was to be developed on the site was also missed. Even councillors in whose ward the site is, and who sit on the Commission, felt that 'things were being done behind closed doors'.

It is clear from the papers that the strategic partnership, for legal reasons, is built on trust. Because we are unable to impose positive obligations on the developer, we must rely on reputation and trust to achieve what we are told they will deliver. It has to be said that the same trust has not been extended to members, which seems to undermine the democratic process.

I have recently had conversations which encourage me to believe that, going forward, members will be allowed to perform their scrutiny duties more fully and that their views will be sought. I also welcome the cross-party working group which Nicola Beech has proposed, as it will give members an opportunity to engage with the design of the proposed development at Temple Island.