

REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

27 JANUARY 2014

31 NOTICE OF MOTION - IMPROVING WIRRAL'S SITES FOR JOBS

The Head of Legal and Member Services advised that at the meeting of the Council held on 14 October 2013 (minute 37 refers), the following Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Phil Gilchrist and seconded by Councillor Alan Brighouse was referred by the Mayor to this Committee for consideration.

IMPROVING WIRRAL'S SITES FOR JOBS

This Council is determined that Wirral must be well placed to take advantage of funds that may be released to improve the infrastructure within the City Region and Wirral in particular.

Council recognises that recent Employment Land studies listed and scored many sites in Wirral with regard to their availability, accessibility and environmental constraints.

Council notes that the current Corporate Plan recognises the need to provide 'accessible employment opportunities'.

Council calls on officers to:

- (a) review the employment sites to establish, in co-operation with the owners, whether there are outdated premises and infrastructure that might be replaced with modern energy efficient premises in a range of sizes and locations.
- (b) work with Wirral's business community to ensure that a range of workshops, modern offices and workplaces is in place, especially in areas of high unemployment.
- (c) bring together proposals that form a bid to be progressed through the new structures involving the Local Enterprise Partnership and the potential of the Combined Authority.

In accordance with Standing Order 7 (6), Councillor Gilchrist had been invited to attend the meeting in order for him to be given an opportunity to explain the Motion. In accordance with Standing Order 7 (5), any recommendation from the Committee in relation to the Notice of Motion would be referred to the Council. Any debate at Council should take place upon the recommendation of the Committee and there should be no separate debate upon the motion itself.

Councillor Gilchrist indicated that the Notice of Motion had been submitted in the light of sites identified in recent Land Studies having been scored with regard to various accessibility and environmental constraints. He referred to actions that had been taken in other local authorities to secure land for development and, in particular

referred to the approaches undertaken in Rochdale and Oldham. He hoped that the officers would be able to complete a review of the employment sites with a view to being able to secure funding through the Local Enterprise Partnership and the Combined Authority.

The Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment indicated that there were about 98000 jobs in Wirral, with a working age population of 180000, and he agreed with the need to make improvements to the employment rate and to build on the good work already undertaken. He indicated that there were some excellent business premises in Wirral and that many businesses moving into them were often relocating from poor quality premises. However, the Council had no funding to address those poor quality premises and with only £6m for gap funding over six years to be spread across the whole of Merseyside in the new European Programme, there were limitations as to what could be achieved with LEP funding. It was also the case that the level of spend required to be undertaken by owners would not be recouped with increased rental levels and furthermore, banks were loathed to lend to speculative builders in the current economic climate. He proposed to provide an example of the difficulties associated with identifying suitable premises, although this would have to be in exempt session, in view of the commercial sensitivity of the information (see minute 42 post).

He confirmed that Wirral would punch its weight in the Combined Authority, but the level of funding available was limited. He referred also to recent independent studies that had ranked Wirral very high in terms of work undertaken to regenerate the local economy and create jobs. He noted that some other local authorities, whilst not performing as well as Wirral, had adopted different approaches to redevelopment opportunities, including building on green belt, although this had never been recommended in Wirral. In response to the Notice of Motion, the Strategic Director was happy to bring back a report to a future meeting, if it was the wish of the Committee.

However, in response to questions from Members, he indicated that with only four staff in the Investment Team, if the work was to be pursued, it would inevitably be at the expense of something else. In view of this and having regard to comments made by the Strategic Director in relation to the lack of funding, Members expressed a view that the response to the Notice of Motion should be for a brief update to be presented to an early meeting of the Committee.

Resolved – That the Council be advised that in view of the lack of funding available to fully pursue the Notice of Motion, the response to it should be for the Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment to present a brief update to an early meeting of the Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee upon the availability of land for employment opportunities.