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ECONOMY REGENERATION & HOUSING COMMITTEE

Monday, 16 September 2024

Present:

Councillor T Jones (Chair)

Councillors	GJ Davies	A Gardner
	A Davies	J Bird
	M Skillicorn	E Lamb
	G Wood	E Tomeny
	A Hodson	H Raymond

98 **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

The Chair opened the meeting and reminded everyone that the meeting was being webcast and a copy is retained on the Council's website for two years.

99 **APOLOGIES**

The Chair informed the committee that no apologies had been received.

100 **MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any items on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Councillor Jo Bird declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in Item 6, Regeneration Update Highlight Report, due to being a resident of a property that could potentially be within the scope of one of the areas highlighted within the report.

101 **MINUTES**

Resolved –That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2024 be approved as a correct record.

102 **PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS**

102.1 **Public Questions**

Pamela Emery asked a question relating to protecting Wirral's Green Belt from development and wished to know what the council was doing to ensure

that the Local Plan was signed off as quickly as possible in order to protect the Green Belt.

The Chair responded that the council was fully committed to adopting the emerging Local Plan as soon as possible. He noted that work was ongoing with the Planning Inspectorate, a six-week consultation period was necessary before any modifications were made and once the Inspectors had submitted their final report, the council could proceed to adopt the plan.

Sandra Gibson asked whether the council remained committed to the Birkenhead 2040 framework by ensuring that its delivery remained on schedule and fully resourced.

The Chair responded that the Birkenhead 2040 Framework and the resulting regeneration programme remained a key priority for the council and the committee. He noted that at the Policy and Resources Committees in March 2024, a budget of £2.7m was approved to provide the necessary resources to deliver this programme.

Paul Ainslie was not in attendance and his question was read out on his behalf by the Lead Principal Lawyer. He asked whether the council would progress the 2040 Framework as a New Town as he felt that it satisfied the criteria, including development of over 10,000 homes, which would give Wirral some flexibility in the rate of home delivery, and time and funding to develop a full infrastructure.

The Chair responded that the Council recognised the opportunities and synergies between the Birkenhead 2040 Framework and the objectives of the New Towns Taskforce. He noted that the Council was in dialogue with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to explore this further.

Paul Ainslie's question was read out on his behalf by the Lead Principal Lawyer. His question related to the difference in life expectancy between the East and West of Wirral. He asked how the committee was ensuring that the public health of East Wirral was improved through the delivery of a regenerated Birkenhead.

The Chair responded that the availability, affordability and quality of housing, transport, the physical environment and employment were all key to addressing health inequalities and formed the foundations of the Council's emerging Local Plan and the Birkenhead 2040 Framework.

Alan Featherstone asked a question relating to Birkenhead Market and its asbestos register. He asked if the Chair was content that Members had possession of all the relevant, accurate and correct information to enable

them to reach a lawful decision regarding the Argos Market at the Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee meeting on 27 March 2024.

The Chair noted that Mr Featherstone was already in correspondence with the Council on these matters and stated that he understood a response based on that written correspondence had been sent to Mr. Featherstone.

Mr Featherstone asked a supplemental question, asking for the Chair to confirm if he was content that all the relevant information was considered by the committee.

The Chair repeated that Mr Featherstone was already in correspondence with the Council on these matters and that he understood that a response based on that written correspondence had been sent to Mr Featherstone.

Alan Featherstone asked a question relating to the difference in available space between the current Birkenhead Market building and the proposed former Argos site. He asked where the Council proposed the traders go and whether it was intent on evicting three quarters of the current traders.

The Chair responded that this had been previously answered during the meeting held on 27 March 2024 and referred Mr Featherstone to the Council's recording of that meeting at approximately 37 minutes into the meeting when Mr Raymond Lynch covered this item. He noted that the Council was currently engaging with market traders regarding the future market.

Mr Featherstone asked a supplemental question. He asked when Mr Raymond Lynch's company would start the consultation with traders. He stated that there was a lot of ambiguity regarding the registering of interest for the Argos site, He stated that he had spoken to Raymond Lynch and he had confirmed that no consultation had taken place yet and none was in the pipeline.

The Chair informed Mr Featherstone that a written response would be sent to him within 10 working days.

102.2 **Statements and Petitions**

Alan Featherstone presented a statement in respect of agenda item 6, Regeneration Programme Highlight Report.

Mr Featherstone stated that he felt that there had been a number of what he considered to be breaches of information regarding Birkenhead Market. He referenced the asbestos register, stakeholder consultations that had not been carried out, and impact assessments that had not been conducted. He felt that the committee should not have made a decision without the information that should have been received through such consultations and assessments.

He felt that the Market Manager and the market consultancy firm that the council had employed should have provided calculations regarding the trading space required by market traders.

He likened the offer of the Argos site to a life-raft after abandoning a sinking ship and noted that while a life-raft was preferable to sinking, it did not make for a sustainable livelihood in the long term.

He raised a concern regarding the speed of spending of grant money in relation to the re-development of Birkenhead Market and claimed that similar redevelopments carried out by the market consultancy firm in other areas had not been as successful as hoped. He felt that the overall cost per square foot would be too high.

He stated that the successful regeneration of Birkenhead, including the market, was vital to encourage developers to invest in the area and avoid development of the Green Belt elsewhere in the borough. He felt that this could only happen if the correct consultation with the relevant stakeholders was undertaken.

102.3 Questions by Members

The Chair informed the committee that no questions had been submitted by Members.

103 REGENERATION PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHT REPORT

The Chief Regeneration Officer presented the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place. The report provided the latest programme monitoring information for the Regeneration & Place Directorate. The design and content of the report was developed following an agreement to provide regular monitoring reports to the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee on an informative basis back in February 2024.

The programme monitoring report had been structured around twelve programme areas relating to masterplans. The data contained in the report related to Quarter 1, 2024 (period ending April-June 2024). The narrative for each programme reflected the current position.

The information had been extracted from the Regeneration & Place Directorate's internal programme assurance monitoring system, which was reviewed and updated on a quarterly basis. This system derived a delivery confidence Red-Amber-Green (RAG) ratings for each programme based on the individual RAG ratings for schedule, budget & risk.

The supporting narrative in the report had been strengthened with programme and project leads from the Regeneration & Place Directorate, providing a narrative to further explain RAG ratings, milestones and mitigating actions.

Members thanked the officers for the report and noted that it gave clear and concise information on the regeneration projects in the borough.

They noted that the Birkenhead Market project appeared to be on track and that the phase 2 consultation for the market had begun, they asked when the consultation was due to close and what the next steps would be.

The Director for Regeneration and Place noted that the consultation began on 2nd September 2024 and would run until 23rd September 2024. He stated there had been nearly 1,800 visits to the consultation website, with 120 people having answered the survey. He noted that in-person engagement had begun that day as well and that work had also been done with students at Wirral Metropolitan College seeking their feedback and ideas. There would be a full consultation on the final design with residents and stakeholders.

Members raised the level of financial risk for a number of developments and sought reassurance that taxpayers would receive value for money for those projects.

The Director for Regeneration and Place acknowledged that there was a level of risk with all regeneration projects and noted that the regeneration benefits to residents had to be weighed against the level of risk and this was done individually with each project. He noted that Wirral had a good relationship with its key stakeholders such as Peel, Homes England and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

Members sought clarity on the projects listed in the report regarding Birkenhead as potentially unachievable, or in doubt as well as some of the main projects in the Wallasey area.

The Director for Regeneration and Place noted that there was still a lot of ongoing work within Birkenhead and that those sites listed with a red RAG rating were still being worked on to improve the RAG rating and therefore make the projects more deliverable.

The Assistant Director, Chief Regeneration Officer responded regarding the Wallasey area and noted that progress was being made on the proposals for the Town Hall area, the plans for the regeneration of Liscard were currently waiting on a Memorandum of Understanding from central government and would be progressed once that had been progressed.

Members asked for clarity on the performance of the regeneration projects as a whole and whether there was anything for Members to be concerned about regarding the number of red RAG rated projects in the report.

The Director for Regeneration and Place noted that the overall scope of regeneration in Wirral was wide and similar to the kinds of projects more frequently seen in London. He noted that there were lots of factors that fed into the success of each project and officers were very aware of the level of risk for each project and how it might be mitigated.

Members raised the need for better transport connectivity and sought assurance that this was being considered.

The Assistant Director, Chief Regeneration Officer noted that strategic transport was a significant part of the regeneration programme along with active travel. A large amount of work was already underway to improve active travel and work with various stakeholders to help route public transport to where it was needed was in hand.

Members asked about the listed improvements in New Ferry town centre and why they were listed as in doubt of completion.

The Assistant Director, Chief Regeneration Officer responded that the highways and environmental improvements had been fully designed and costed but that there was currently no funding yet secured to undertake the work. She assured councillors that funding was being sought and as soon as it was secured, work could commence.

Members noted that under section 9 of the appendix on Wirral Waters (Northbank, MEA Park & Four Bridges) an expected date was not visible, with a number of question marks where it should be. They asked if that date was available.

The AD, Chief Regeneration Officer apologised that this had remained in the report and noted that the question marks had been left with the expectation that a date would be confirmed by the Combined Authority on when the Gateway 3 submission could be expected before the report was published. She noted that this date had not yet been provided but that officers were in dialogue with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority on the matter.

Members noted that the previously planned Dementia Village in Wirral Waters had fallen through and asked if another provider was being sought.

The Assistant Director, Chief Regeneration Officer noted that currently there was unlikely to be a like-for-like replacement, but that Peel were looking into a provider for extra-care facilities within the Wirral Waters development.

Members noted that they wished to keep the Maritime Knowledge Hub in mind for future discussion. They also queried the possibility of Central Government clawing back any of the funding that Wirral has won for regeneration projects in Birkenhead.

The Director of Regeneration and Place noted the Members' comments on the Maritime Knowledge Hub. Regarding the possibility of clawback. He stated that his department was looking to spend any funding it had in the right way and that he was confident based on the progress that had been made with various projects over the past year.

Resolved – That the contents of the programme monitoring report attached in Appendix A be noted.

104 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Lead Principal Lawyer presented the report on behalf of the Chair of the Committee. Members were informed that the work programme should align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which are within the remit of the Committee.

Members agreed that they would like to see an update of the Regeneration Programme Highlight Report on a six-monthly basis.

Resolved - That the Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee work programme for the remainder of the 2024/25 municipal year be agreed.

105 **EGERTON VILLAGE**

The Director of Regeneration and Place presented his report which noted that on 22 January 2024, the Committee authorised the Director of Regeneration and Place, in consultation with the Director of Finance, to approve the novation of the Grant Funding Agreement for the Egerton Village project from Peel L&P Investments and Property Limited to Starship Regeneration Egerton Village Limited with Peel L&P Holdings (UK) Ltd acting as continuing Guarantor. This novation was subject to a number of requirements being satisfied by the parties involved.

Egerton Village was proposed as new high quality mixed-use development to come forward within Wirral Waters.

The Council had been informed by Peel representatives that the requirement of continuing Guarantor, as resolved by Committee on 22 January 2024, could not be met. Therefore, the report provided an update to Members on the position with matters for consideration and suggested a proposed revision to 'step in' rights as an alternative approach to mitigate risk.

The Assistant Director, Chief Regeneration Officer indicated that the recommendations to members were slightly altered in order for the decision to be most accurately recorded. The change in wording had been supplied to all Members of the committee in writing.

The Chair reported that several members had indicated that they wished to discuss the content of the exempt appendix. Therefore, on a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Andrew Gardner, it was –

Resolved – That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the grounds it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The Public Interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.

Following a debate on the matter, it was -

Resolved – That

- 1. The Director of Regeneration and Place in consultation with the Director of Finance be authorised to proceed with a novation of the grant agreement relating to the Egerton Village project between the Council and Peel L&P Investments and Property Limited (with Peel L&P Holdings (UK) Ltd acting as guarantor) to Starship Regeneration Egerton Village Limited subject to any remaining pre-conditions for novation, as resolved by this Committee on 22 January 2024, being satisfied, and;**
- 2. The Director of Law and Corporate Services be authorised to agree and finalise the Deed of Novation of the Grant Agreement with the relevant parties, subject to ‘step in’ rights described in para 3.3 of Appendix 1 being incorporated but without a guarantee from Peel L&P Holdings (UK) Ltd as set out in paragraph 3.4 of Appendix 1.**

106 EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved – That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the following appendix be deemed to be exempt from publication on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act.

Egerton Village - Exempt Appendix 1.