

# Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2017 at Pippbrook, Dorking from 7.00pm to 8:47pm

Present: Councillors David Draper (Chairman), David Harper (Vice Chairman), Tim Ashton, Stephen Cooksey, Rosemary Dickson, Mary Huggins, Chris Hunt, Malcolm Ladell, Paul Potter, Sarah Seed and Peter Stanyard (Substituting for Patricia Wiltshire)

Also present: Councillors Duncan Irvine, Metin Huseyin and Vivienne Michael

## 6. Minutes

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> May were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## 7. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Simon Edge, Lynne Brooks and Patricia Wiltshire

## 8. Disclosure of Interests

No interests were declared.

## 9. Claire House & James House, Leatherhead – Development Strategy

The Leader of the Council introduced the report by explaining that the recommendations were the next steps in the journey which started two years ago at the beginning of the Transform Leatherhead project. The riverside location of Claire House and James House was a major asset to Transform Leatherhead. The plans were to replace the currently outdated office buildings with a ground floor café and approximately 40 apartments above. It was noted that it was not appropriate to debate planning issues at this stage and that this should be reserved for the Development Control Committee to avoid predetermination.

Members questioned why the idea of using the buildings as a hotel had not been taken forward. A hotel would present the opportunity for weddings, conferences, and club AGMs to be held, as well as encouraging tourists to stay longer in Leatherhead. The Deputy Chief Executive explained that they had received specialist advice from their commercial property agents, Colliers, to suggest that a hotel would not be a viable option for the Claire House and James House site. It was further advised that whilst a new hotel would be an asset to Leatherhead, it would need to be in a location close to either the M25 junction or the train station. In accordance with the advice received from Colliers, the riverside location of Claire House and James House was not considered preferable for this type of development.

A Member suggested that Claire House and James House could be used as a business innovation centre, which would encourage businesses into the District and present employment opportunities for residents. It was explained by the Deputy Chief Executive that the professional advice which had been provided confirmed that this was not an appropriate location for office use. Additionally, in terms of viability, office use would not provide the required rental return.

A Member expressed concern over the cost of the fees stated in the report. It was explained that professional fees were often approximately 15% of the overall cost of the project; in this instance the project was expected to cost within the region of £10 million and as such the fees were proportionate.

After a question was raised about the risk factors relating to this project, it was explained that the primary risk was obtaining planning permission for the development. As a developer, Mole Valley District Council would be treated the same as any other developer during the planning process. The advisors preparing the application for the site would be working closely with the planning authority during the process to reduce the risk of planning permission not being granted. It was envisaged that the design would be of a high quality and would set a standard for the Transform Leatherhead project going forward.

A Member asked whether the flats or apartments which would occupy the upper floors of the building would be tenanted or leasehold. It was explained that this would be looked at once the project was underway and could not be confirmed at this stage. It was noted that provision for affordable housing was also being considered in the project.

Members welcomed the opportunity to view the documentation that related to the report and it was agreed that this would be made available on the Members Extranet (MOSS) before the Executive.

**Resolved:** That the comments of the Scrutiny Committee be relayed to the Executive during its consideration of the report.

(NOTE: This report was withdrawn from the Executive meeting in July 2017 for further review and would be returning to Scrutiny Committee and Executive later in the year.)

## **10. Future Mole Valley – consultation on issues and options**

The Executive Member for Planning introduced the report and explained that at this stage they wanted to seek the opinions of the public on the options and issues relating to the Future Mole Valley. The consultation would be communicated to the public using various means so as to reach a wider demographic. This would include the use of social media as well as more traditional means such as door drops. The results of the consultation would be reported back to the Scrutiny Committee later in the year.

Questions were raised about how Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) would expect to deal with the infrastructure pressures presented by additional housing. It was explained that MVDC would raise funds to meet the infrastructure needs through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which was collected as part of the development process.

Members expressed concern over the emphasis of the consultation report and suggested that words such as 'might' and 'could' should be used instead of 'will' and 'would'. The Executive Member for Planning agreed that this was something which could be amended in the report.

Concern was raised over the clarity of the maps in the consultation report, as it was not clear what these represented. It was agreed that these would be looked at and adjusted where possible.

A Member suggested that the measurements in the report could be referred to in square feet as well as meters or be compared to something recognisable such as Trafalgar Square. This would make the consultation document more accessible to residents who may not be familiar with square metres and would struggle to picture the scale of what was being referred to.

After concern was raised about the figures in the report relating to housing demand and supply, the Committee welcomed the suggestion that a seminar for Members could be scheduled to provide more detail on the Strategic Housing Market Assessment.

Concern was raised over the timing of the consultation and it was suggested that it be extended into early September.

**Resolved:** That the comments of the Scrutiny Committee be relayed to the Executive during its consideration of the report.

## **11. The Swan Centre – Development & Asset Management Initiatives**

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and explained that the Swan Centre was a key part of the retail and leisure quarter, as set out in the Transform Leatherhead masterplan. There would be phased work to create four new units and improve the multi-storey car park. These works met the criteria for applying for Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) capital funding.

A Member questioned why the report referred to rubber buffers being put on pillars and walls, but not the kerbs in the car park which were currently very steep. Officers explained that the kerbs would be sloped so that vehicles would not be damaged should they roll onto them. This would also provide drivers with more space when navigating the tight corners in the car park. The kerbs could be covered in small bumps similar to a rumble strip on a motorway, so drivers would be alerted when they drove onto the kerb.

Members welcomed the introduction of a user friendly post payment system for the car park as this would give shoppers more value for money when parking in the Swan Centre. It would also eliminate the need for shoppers to rush back to their vehicles when their parking ticket was due to expire.

Concern was raised over whether the service charge contribution for elements of the work outlined in the report was something which MVDC could undertake within the terms of the leases at The Swan Centre. Officers confirmed that this had been checked and reassurance was given that the proposed work was within the terms of the leases, and that discussions had been held with tenants.

It was asked whether any bays would be reserved for long term parking in the Swan Centre car park. It was advised that the priority was to provide short term parking for shoppers using the Swan Centre. However, negotiations were taking place with tenants to see whether they would be interested in allowing long term parking on the lesser used upper floors.

The Committee discussed shop mobility and were pleased to hear that the same number of disabled bays would continue to be provided in the car park. It was planned that these would be distributed throughout the car park close to the lifts (once replaced), instead of being positioned all together on one floor as they were in the current layout of the car park.

Questions were raised over the size of the four additional units which were being proposed in the plan. It was explained by Officers that two of the units would be small in size and the other two would be kiosks. Both of these unit sizes were considered lettable and would appeal to local traders.

A number of grammatical and presentational issues were raised and it was agreed that these would be corrected prior to the report being taken to Executive.

Overall the Committee welcomed the initiative and the much needed improvements to the car park.

**Resolved:** That the comments of the Scrutiny Committee be relayed to the Executive during its consideration of the report.

## **12. The Scrutiny Work Programme 2017-2018**

The Chairman introduced the report and explained that the 14<sup>th</sup> November meeting would be a combined external & internal Scrutiny Committee, as Members would be receiving a presentation from the Police and Crime Commissioner. It was advised that Scrutiny Panels were in the process of being finalised and would be confirmed at a later date. It was noted that the Scrutiny Committee would be looking to invite Members who had been appointed to outside bodies to report on the work they had achieved over the year.

**Resolved:** That the Scrutiny Committee consider the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2017-2018