

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 9th March, 2017.

Present:- Councillors Nazir (Chair), Strutton (Vice-Chair), Bedi, N Holledge, Parmar, Sadiq, A Sandhu, R Sandhu and Usmani.

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Munawar

PART I

67. Declarations of Interest

None were received.

68. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 2 February 2017

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd February 2017 be approved as a correct record.

69. Action Progress Report

Following the Committee's concerns at the previous meeting, regarding the proposed increase in fees for Public Graves for Adults by 20% and the 10% increase for Stillborn to Age 17; Members were informed that at its meeting on 6th February, Cabinet agreed that that a specific ringfenced reserve be set aside for this purpose.

Resolved – That details of the Action Progress Report be noted.

70. Member Questions

None received.

71. Town Centre Management Update

The Town Centre Manager provided the Committee with an update on town centre activities and Slough Town Centre Partnership's vision for the future of the town centre. It was outlined that the Partnership, which comprised of members of the public, private, voluntary and community sectors had been instrumental in obtaining business views and sharing information on regeneration activities underway in Slough town. The focus of the Partnership was to position Slough town centre as a key business location as well as a local destination for shopping and leisure. In order to implement this vision which linked to the Five Year Plan Outcome 5, Priority "Creating a vibrant town centre", a number of actions focussing on improving the image and perceptions of the town had been devised.

Members were informed that a town centre visitor satisfaction survey, undertaken in 2016, evaluated visitors' views and perceptions of the town centre as well as identifying their needs and requirements. 65% of the respondents had indicated that improvements to the general appearance

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would encourage them to use Slough town centre. Respondents stated that the high concentration of betting shops, cash converter outlets, takeaways, pound shops, phone repair shops was deterring them from using the town centre. A number of Members asked whether the Town Centre Manager had explored the possibility of hosting a variety of alternative events, such as a Farmers Market or Arts and Crafts stalls, in an attempt to increase the number of visitors to the High Street. It was noted that a successful events programme, hosted by a range of stakeholders in collaboration with the Council, was delivered between April 2016 and February 2017 and it was envisaged that further activities would be delivered later in 2017.

Anecdotal evidence had shown that the town centre has seen an increase in footfall since the opening of The Curve in September 2016. However, this was queried and a Member requested that footfall activity statistics be provided relating to visitors at the previous library site, for two years prior to the opening of the Curve, which would allow a meaningful comparison to be made. Concerns regarding anti-social behaviour at the Curve and disability access to facilities at the venue were raised. It was agreed that these matters would be raised with the management at the Curve.

Following the recent announcement that Abu Dhabi Investment Authority had acquired The Queensmere and Observatory shopping centres, details of the redevelopment plans were still awaited at this stage. It was anticipated however that this major investment would transform the centre into a residential, retail and leisure destination which could attract people from further afield and restore Slough's role as a sub regional centre. Members sought assurances that the planned investment would be forthcoming and requested an indicative timetable be provided regarding development. The Town Centre Manager informed Members that it was anticipated that a planning application was likely to be submitted in mid 2018.

It was brought to Members attention that whilst there was significant development of regeneration and infrastructure projects progressing in the centre of Slough, it was advised that greater focus should also be given to the High Street. Consequently, the development and delivery of a Business Improvement District (BID) was raised as a possible solution to meeting the needs and requirements of residents, workers, shoppers and visitors. Members were informed that a BID was a recognised model for engaging with stakeholders, particularly businesses and would be developed by the local business community for the benefit of the businesses, whilst also benefiting the rest of the community within the area.

Following a Member query, the Committee were informed that a BID was established through a ballot of all those businesses involved, who were required to pay a levy. This ballot would follow a thorough research and consultation phase which would focus on the needs and requirements of the potential contributors within that location and, if successful, a BID levy would become mandatory for a period of up to five years. A BID would then invest in its local area by delivering projects and services against an agreed

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business plan that would be designed to provide benefits to those who pay first and foremost whilst contributing to the wider community.

The Town Centre Manager explained that an expert placemaking consultancy would need to be appointed in order to carry out a scoping exercise and feasibility study, and if viable, a BID proposal will be produced followed by the development and implementation stages. It was envisaged the scoping exercise would be undertaken in late 2017, should Member approval be given to the BID proposal.

A range of issues were raised in the ensuing discussion regarding the evening and night time economy. It was noted that the town centre visitor satisfaction survey found that 59% of respondents said they did not visit Slough town centre in the evening; 69% of respondents stated a safe and secure town centre would encourage them to use Slough town centre in the evening; and 94% would not recommend Slough town centre as an evening destination. In order to address these points the Purple Flag programme had been identified as the possible solution to developing an evening and night time economy. It was explained that Purple Flag was the international accreditation scheme and “gold standard” for town centres in the evening and at night. Places that were accredited with this status could fly the flag, to the benefit of their image, local perceptions and their local economies. A Kickstart Workshop, an introduction to the Purple Flag programme was planned for later in 2017 to start the journey in applying for the accreditation. Members requested that further information be provided, including financial costs of implementing the programme and criteria applied to assess accreditation. In addition, information relating other local authorities who had achieved Purple Flag Status would be useful. It was agreed that the information would be circulated to the Committee.

Resolved –

- a) That the progress made to date in delivering the priority actions for town centre improvements be noted.
- b) That Cabinet be recommended to support the exploration of a Business Improvement District for Slough as the best possible solution for revitalising Slough Town Centre.

72. Economic Growth Update

The Interim Economic and Growth Enterprise Manager provided the Committee with an update on progress made in meeting the ambitions set out in the Economic Growth Strategy. The Committee were informed that Slough was entering a time of opportunity with the government selecting Heathrow as its preferred option for airport expansion, town centre investment through Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, improving infrastructure both in transport as well as homes, schools and leisure.

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Members were informed that the recent Centre for Cities report 2017 had highlighted a number of positive areas, which included:

- The best 5GCSE results in the country
- 2nd highest GVA outside London
- 3rd highest business start up in the country
- Improving leisure facilities such as Arbour Park
- Delivering improvements to a number of schools
- Building 2 new hotels
- Securing £500m investment into the Town Centre

It was noted that some of the successes were demonstrated through the effectiveness of the Council's partnerships e.g youth services, pre employability courses, adult and community learning, job brokerage and many others.

Challenges facing the Borough were raised in the ensuing discussion, including ensuring people who lived in the Borough were equipped with the skill set to enable them to achieve employment. It was outlined that whilst the Borough had a relatively low unemployment at 9.3%, residents who were employed were significantly over represented in lower skilled roles and under represented in professional roles. The Strategic Skills and Employment Group was focused on ensuring Slough and in particular its residents had access to develop the right skills and opportunities. A Member asked whether the Council engaged with businesses to maximise apprenticeship opportunities for young people and was informed that this was stipulated as part of the contractual agreement with those companies the Council had a formal partnership with ie arvato. The matter would be explored further with regard to private businesses, such as Mars, O2 taking on apprenticeships.

The importance of ensuring that existing businesses, both small and large, were supported was highlighted as a key factor in the continuing economic growth of the Borough. Potential factors that could affect this included the outcome of Brexit, the prospect of Crossrail and its improving access to east London and the expansion of Heathrow. It was noted that dialogue was ongoing with a number of companies and the trading estate's regional manager. It was brought to Members attention that although Slough had the third highest start up for businesses in the country, many did not succeed. To address this, events had also taken place to provide information and support to small businesses, which included the Enterprise Cube at the Curve, which was a twelve week programme providing professional services and coaching to small/medium size businesses who had recently established in the area. Responding to concerns regarding the potential environmental impacts of Heathrow expansion, the Committee were informed that the matter was due to be considered at the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel scheduled for 26 June 2017. A Member raised whether the expansion of Heathrow would benefit local residents in terms of employment opportunities. It was highlighted that Heathrow had established a jobs Academy and residents were able to apply to vacancies through this.

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The Committee were informed that the current Economic Growth and Enterprise Strategy, which was agreed in 2014, was currently being refreshed in recognition of the changing circumstances as set out above. As part of the Five Year Plan the following objectives had been identified to delivering the Council's outcomes:

- Creating the Slough story
- Delivering high quality skills and training
- Providing excellent infrastructure
- A clear local plan
- Attracting new investment
- Retain and growing existing business
- Delivering creativity and innovation

The proposed process for developing the strategy was outlined and it was agreed that the Committee would review the strategy in early/mid October 2017, prior to its launch in November 2017.

Resolved –

- a) That the progress made in delivering the priority in the Economic Growth Strategy be noted.
- b) That the intention to rewrite the Economic Growth Strategy be noted.
- c) That the Committee receive an update on the re-write of the Economic Strategy prior to its launch in November 2017.

73. Forward Work Programme

Resolved – That details of the Work Programme be noted and the following items be scheduled to the Committee's 2017/18 Work Programme -

- Sale of Vehicles on the public highway: explore the possibility of the implementation of by-laws to address the issue.
- Digitalisation Programme & HR (Scrutiny of Performance and Management including staffing, temporary agency staff, sickness absence).
- Economic Growth Strategy Update – September/October 2017.

74. Members Attendance Record 2016/17

Resolved – That details of the Members' Attendance Record be noted.

75. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 13th April 2017.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.14 pm)