

PLACE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

6th September 2021

Present: Councillor Mrs. Lucy Hodgson in the Chair
Councillors Agar, A. Amos, Carver, Cleary, Geraghty, Gregson, Hodges (Vice-Chair), Lewing, Norfolk and Stanley

Officers: David Blake, Managing Director
Sian Stroud, Corporate Director – Planning and Governance
Simeon Manley, Interim Head of Planning
Corin Beames, Planning Policy Team Leader
Helen Mole, Tourism and City Centre Manager
Michelle Newell, Tourism and Events Officer

23 Appointment of Substitutes

None.

24 Declarations of Interest

The following declaration of interest was made:

Councillor Gregson – Charter 400 Update (Minute No. 31) – As a member of the Charter 400 Working Group.

25 Public Participation

None.

26 Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 26th July 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters arising:

The Managing Director had sent his apologies for the meeting but had provided a written response to a number of issues that had been raised at this meeting. This was circulated to Members and a copy is appended to the minutes.

27 Local Development Scheme 2021-2024

The Committee considered a report on the Local Development Scheme 2021/2024.

The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the recommendation at 1.1 of the report which is to be amended to recommend that Council approve the Local Development Scheme 2021/2024 set out in Appendix 1 to come into effect from 1st October 2021.

The most recent Local Development Scheme (LDS) for the South Worcestershire Councils was adopted in October 2020. The September 2021 LDS will cover the period 2021/2024 and was attached as Appendix 1 to the report. The revised LDS main changes were outlined in paragraph 2.3 of the report.

The Planning Policy Team Leader, in presenting the report, drew the Committee's attention to the revised South Worcestershire Development Plan Review timetable as outlined in paragraph 3.5 of the report.

Committee Members expressed support for the revised LDS.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. recommend that Council approve the Local Development Scheme 2021/2024 set out in Appendix 1 to come into effect from 1st October 2021; and**
- 2. delegate authority to the Corporate Director – Planning and Governance in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Place and Economic Development Committee to make minor amendments to the Local Development Scheme prior to publication.**

28 South Worcestershire Five Year Housing Land Supply 2021

The Committee received a report on the South Worcestershire Five Year Housing Land Supply 2021.

The Planning Policy Team Leader, in presenting the report, drew the Committee's attention to Table 1 at paragraph 3.3 of the report, which set out the South Worcestershire Councils' Standard Method calculation.

The detailed Five Year Housing Land Supply (5YHLS) report was attached as Appendix 1 to the report, which demonstrated that the South Worcestershire Councils can demonstrate a robust 5YHLS of 5.76 against the Standard Method housing requirement for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2026.

The Planning Policy Team Leader responded to questions from Committee Members, particularly around addressing past oversupply as set out in section 5 of the appendix.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. notes the publication of the South Worcestershire Councils 2021 Five Year Housing Land Supply (5YHLS) Report and Appendices on 22 September 2021, which details that Officers consider for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2026 a robust 5YHLS against the Standard Method housing requirement can be demonstrated; and**

- 2. notes that on account of the South Worcestershire Councils being able to demonstrate a 5YHLS, all policies in the South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP) relating to the supply of housing should be given full weight in the determination of planning applications (excluding the elements of SWDP3 which are no longer appropriate given the utilisation of the Standard Method housing requirement and associated change in approach to 5YHLS).**

29 HMO Advertising Boards

The Committee considered a report on HMO advertising boards.

At the Council meeting on 23rd February 2021 it was resolved:

That the Council agree that the proliferation of HMO Advertising boards across the City, and in particular St Clement and St John's Wards, creates an eyesore and detracts from the residential nature of parts of the City. The advancement in digital advertising platforms, supported by evidence from the University and students themselves who advise that they look for properties online using platforms such as Student Pad, would negate the need for this form of obtrusive advertising. Consequently, Council refers the issue to the Place and Economic Development Sub-Committee in order to consider the issue and to amend the policy as necessary.

The Interim Head of Planning, in presenting the report, drew the Committee's attention to the current Planning Enforcement Policy attached as Appendix 1 to the report. The preferred option was not to change the Policy as it was considered to be fit for purpose in pursuing breaches of Advertisement Regulations. The other preferred option was to take a proactive approach to the control of unauthorised Class 3(A) signage and write to all those individuals/companies within Worcester City who put up this type of signage. A draft letter was attached as Appendix 2 for Committee Members information.

The current Advertisement Regulations were explained by the Interim Head of Planning, covered at paragraphs 2.2-2.10 of the report, which also included the City Council's current process for dealing with any breaches. The Interim Head of Planning responded to questions from Committee Members.

Although Committee Members agreed to a letter being sent out to landlords/letting agents it was felt that a sterner and more robust approach needed to be taken, although it was good to remind them of the current regulations. It was considered that a report back to Committee to see how more proactive the Council can be would give confidence to Members that we are taking robust action as an authority.

Committee Members also agreed that it would be beneficial for officers to engage with stakeholders and partners to look at ways in reducing the number of advertisement boards with the intention that they would phase out over time. It was acknowledged that students in particular access availability of accommodation very differently. A press release, alerting the public to the requirement for advertisement boards to be removed within 14 days of a grant of a tenancy, was considered appropriate.

A further report back to a future Committee had been proposed and this was seconded, this report to update on the engagement with stakeholders and partners in taking a proactive approach to reduce the amount of advertisement boards and a mechanism to track progress.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to:

- 1. leave the current Enforcement Policy unchanged but endorse taking a more proactive approach in working with the particular housing sector to ensure compliance with the advertisement regulation and ensure breaches are pursued and enforced against when expediate to do so, including potential prosecution; and**
- 2. request Officers to engage with stakeholders and partners, by taking a proactive approach, to remove or reduce the proliferation of boards and for the Committee to receive a report on its progress in due course.**

30 Christmas in Worcester Update

The Committee received a report on Christmas in Worcester activity.

At the meeting in June 2021, Members had requested regular updates on the planning for this year's Victorian Christmas Fayre and Christmas market. Details for both were provided at paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3 of the report.

The Tourism and City Centre Manager, in presenting the report, provided a summary of activities planned for both events, which were outlined in paragraphs 3 and 4.

As discussed and requested at the June meeting updates were provided on the risk management of the events, which was covered at paragraph 5 of the report.

Committee Members were also informed that there was a new supplier for the festive illuminations – LITE Ltd. The contract will last for 3 years. The Christmas lights switch on event will take place on Saturday 27th November 2021.

The Tourism and City Centre Manager responded to questions from Committee Members, particularly around extending the events into The Tything/Barbourne Road where there are a lot of independent shops/restaurants/bars. Committee Members were informed that as much as possible is provided out of the budget available but could look at this.

Committee Members welcomed the report and thanked the Tourism and City Centre Manager and her team for the updated planned activities for December.

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the update on Christmas in Worcester activity.

31 Charter 400 Update

The Committee received a report on the planned activities to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Charter of James I.

The Tourism and Events Officer presented the report and informed the Committee that in December 2020 a Charter 400 Working Group was established consisting of representatives from the Worcester Heritage Partnership; City Council Tourism and Events Team; Museums Worcestershire; Archive and Archaeology Services and the Civic Society.

The key activities to celebrate the anniversary were highlighted in paragraph 3.2 of the report. Wider engagement across the city included further activities which were highlighted at paragraph 3.3.

The Tourism and Events Officer explained that the following were also to be provided as part of the celebrations:

- Launch of a Charter essay competition;
- Planting of 44 mixed broadleaved saplings with the support of the Operations Team, location to be confirmed;
- Commissioning of a videographer/photographer to undertake an end of year commemoration film on various aspects of the celebrations;
- Twinning Association producing a twinning booklet of photos through the ages.

The Managing Director reminded Members of the invitation to the Discover History Tours which are happening on the 14th and 20th September 2021 at 6.00pm-6.30pm to mark the 400th Anniversary of the 1621 Charter. The tour is an opportunity to learn more about how the city was governed, the privileges it received and understand what the Charter means. Feedback from the tours would be useful.

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the planned activities to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Charter of James I.

32 Any Other Business

None.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00p.m. to 8.20p.m.

Chairman at the meeting on
1st November 2021

Place and Economic Development Committee – Managing Director’s Update

6th September 2021

Matters arising

As a point of information the Committee noted that the City had decided not to bid to become the next City of Culture. It was asked where this decision had been made and recorded. It was confirmed that it had not been a matter for this meeting, but a written response would be provided to Members.

This matter has not been the recent subject of an agenda item for any officer or Member meeting.

Quarter 1 Performance Report 2021/22

Review of the SWDP - confirmation requested of proposed delay

Agenda item for 6th September PED Committee.

City Centre Masterplan, update requested, also had the archaeology report been completed as the Archaeological Officer had left the City Council?

Progressing - expected to be finalised end of Autumn 2021

Awaiting final archaeology reports (internal review needs to be progressed) as well as integrated drainage report (model has been built and various options/scenarios are currently being run/explored, with a target date of 15th October 2021 for completion).

Planning applications determined within 8 weeks, clarity requested on whether due to staff and /or covid

Whilst there have been no direct incidents of Covid 19 within the DM team, the requirement to work from home has had a significant impact upon it operational, particularly with respect of the more junior officers in receiving the day-to-day support associated with working within the office.

The indirect impact of Covid 19 is more significant as it has resulted in a marked increase in the numbers of applications being received by WCC (a 23% increase in cases); a phenomenon being experienced across the county. This is probably due to the people working from home more and wanting more space (generating an increase in domestic extension applications) and the stamp duty holiday and the associated surge in the housing market.

This increase in the numbers of the applications has exacerbated the issue of current vacancies within the DM team with officers experiencing very high numbers of cases, particularly with respect of the ‘Other’ application which includes domestic extensions, thus going some way to explaining the dip in performance.

In terms of staffing, to address the above issues, an Interim Senior Planner has been appointed, starting today (6th Sept.) and we are in the process of securing a further interim Planning Officer with interviews taking place this week. In this respect, the Council has been actively trying to appoint interim support for some time but, due to the surge in application numbers nationally this has proven to be very difficult with a real shortage of potential candidates.

In terms of the permeant posts, we are currently in the process of shortlisting candidates to the Assistant Enforcement Officer post and are currently going out to advert for a Planning Officer.

In addition to the above, the Director is currently engaged with the Head of Planning in reviewing staffing needs/structure within the team.

Appeals of major planning decisions allowed, is this just one appeal?

Yes, one appeal.

Employment Skills and Strategy Review

In responding to questions from Committee Members on the DWP Youth Hub, long term provision of skills and training to meet future needs of business and key sectors and details of the programme delivered by Young Solutions, the Economic Development Officer agreed to provide additional information in relation to these items to Members.

Additional information has been circulated separately to Members.

Officers are currently awaiting Youth Hub details from DWP. These are expected this month and will be provided to members as soon as available.

The Young Solutions Seek & Reach Programme has been funded for twelve months by the City Council and this has also formed a part of the Vestia/WCT CRF bid (we currently await a decision from government). Work is also underway with The Arches team to design a live brief project for the NEET cohort.

Details of the WLEP Employment & Skills Board [Employment & Skills - Worcestershire LEP \(wlep.co.uk\)](https://www.wlep.co.uk)

Future High Street Fund - Intervention 4: Property Enhancement Scheme (The Cross and Angel Street)

Clarification on the level of funding referred to in paragraph 3.5

The level will be 75% of the total costs of the works up to up to a maximum of £30,000 per application. In exceptional cases where an additional level of investment would realise significant additional benefits for the overall FHSF programme, officers may recommend a greater sum/proportion.

What steps would be taken if property owners decide not to take advantage of the scheme.

If a property requires significant improvement and the owner does not wish to make any enhancements, officers will consider other options including CPO (with appropriate legal advice) and make recommendations to Members.

David Blake