

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
REGENERATION SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

HELD ON MONDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2007

Present: Councillor D. Raine (Chair)
Councillors S. Bishop, Mrs. S.
Forster, H. High, A.J. Holmes,
D.J. Taylor-Gooby and C. Walker

Apologies: Councillor Mrs. E.M. Connor and
Mrs. B.A. Sloan

1. **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 29 October 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.
2. **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 6 November 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were submitted.

RESOLVED that the information contained within the Minutes, be noted.

3. **PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

There were no members of the public present.

4. **WHITEHOUSE AND BRACKENHILL INDUSTRIAL PARKS**

The Chair welcomed Dave Wafer - Durham County Council, William Hill - One North East and John Webster - County Durham Development Company to the meeting to discuss ongoing problems regarding traffic management and flow to and from the aforementioned business parks.

Members had previously raised concerns regarding traffic accessing and egressing the industrial parks at peak times. Members of the public had made complaints and were seeking a solution to the problem.

D. Wafer explained that he was the Business Manager responsible for traffic at Durham County Council. There had been some traffic issues on the industrial parks for some time. There was a lot of call centre business on the parks and their operations all started and finished at the same time with an old fashioned shift system. In 2003, they looked at getting the call centres to change their start and end time but this had been virtually impossible. A lot of the call centres were linked to others located elsewhere in the country and overseas, and as such the operations at the Whitehouse and Brackenhill sites could not be amended independently.

The highway layout on Whitehouse Way had been changed in 2003. The approach road to the roundabout and the road up to the A19 had been widened with two lanes which had made a huge difference. Feedback was received from tenants on the estate at regular monthly meetings. Since the road had been amended, there had been no complaints from tenants. The traffic network did get very busy but the queues died down fairly quickly. Mr. Wafer had visited the business park the previous week and it took him 6-7 minutes to get out onto the roundabout although this could vary on a day to day basis.

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D. Wafer explained that the main bottleneck was the roundabout at the A19 which also had an effect on the the North West Industrial Estate. He felt that the current situation was the most suitable and the traffic could get in an out at a reasonable level.

A Member explained that he had received complaints that it took at least 20 minutes to half an hour to get out of the business park. Some companies had been offered to relocate on the business park but they had declined because of the traffic problem for their staff. He had been informed that there was another 700 people moving into the industrial park and explained that this would have added pressure on the traffic system. He queried if there could be temporary controlled traffic lights or any possibility of connecting the two estates together so traffic could egress the roundabout at Whitehouse Industrial Park.

D. Wafer explained that the way the industrial estates had been developed would not allow the two to be linked together and he was not aware of what the benefits would be as the second estate was still being developed. He felt that using temporary traffic signals would create more of a problem and the traffic would be queuing longer.

A Member commented that if cars were queuing for up to half an hour, they may make rash decisions and could cause an accident. D. Wafer explained that he was not aware of any accidents. The surveys that had been completed suggested that a half hour wait was an exception and was usually a lot less than that.

John Webster explained that in the early 90's, Brackenhill had been built for an office business park with lower density environment for approximately 1,400 people. The business park became an attractive place for call centres, therefore making this a high density industrial park. There were 3,500 jobs on the park before Orange closed the previous year. Although the traffic was a problem for a short period of time, the District had the benefit of the jobs. Tenants had made representations regarding the traffic and those issues had been addressed and a solution sought. If Shotton Lane was opened up, it would have a knock on effect on the rest of Shotton. At the moment, Brackenhill Business Park had one large building vacant and Whitehouse Business Park had some unoccupied units.

The Chair commented that the District Council did not want to reduce the number of jobs on the Business Park but wanted to make it more attractive for businesses to locate there. He suggested that Officers look at ways to rectify the traffic problem to make the estate more attractive.

A Member suggested that a road could be built south onto the A19 and the A1086 as there should be an outlet to the south which would alleviate problems experienced at the north.

A Member explained that they did not want to send traffic through Shotton and queried if Shotton Lane could be used to go in and out. D. Wafer explained that Shotton Lane could only go northbound. This had been closed because the Highways Agency wanted to reduce traffic coming out of the access. This was a tight junction which was now made worse since the footbridge had been built. He added that the Highway Agency would not accept an access onto the A19.

A Member suggested that the Companies on the industrial parks should be contacted for them to try and amend their shift pattern.

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A Member queried if there was a bus service on Brackenhill Industrial Park. D. Wafer explained that there had been additional funding for the bus service but once the funding ran out, the service had stopped but there had not been a great deal of take up. The business parks had a wide catchment area and it was difficult to get people to use public transport. There was a Travel Plan Officer who talked to companies and he would ask them to renew their efforts in the area. He added that he would arrange for more surveys to be carried out and John Webster would raise the issue at the next tenants meeting and contact companies to see if they could do anything to help the situation.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance.

RESOLVED that Officers be asked to investigate those issues raised by Members as possible methods of alleviating the problems that had been identified and an update be given at a future meeting.

5. **FEEDBACK FROM SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

At the last meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on 12 November 2007, the following issues were discussed:-

- * Review of Polling Places and Polling Districts
- * Countywide Review of Public Transport

RESOLVED that the information given be noted.

6. **SERVICE UNIT PERFORMANCE REPORTING - REGENERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Regeneration and Partnerships which provided information on the performance of the Regeneration and Partnerships Unit, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Details of the initial performance from 1 June 2007 to 1 November 2007 was outlined in Appendix 1 to the report. Progress, achievements and non achievements were also fully detailed.

Members were advised that the service had continued to manage and facilitate large infrastructure investment and development projects.

- * East Durham Link Road/Hawthorn Business Park
- * Seaham St. Johns Square
- * Seaham/Murton Colliery sites
- * The GREAT Initiative
- * North Dock Feasibility Studies

The unit had facilitated work to complete a number of appraisals for Dawdon, Horden and Easington Colliery as part of the Durham Coalfield Housing Initiative. Easington Colliery and Dawdon had been identified as early priorities for the first three years of the Durham Coalfield Housing Initiative and draft funding programmes had been completed for the consideration of funding partners in the coming months.

The unit had led on the recent enquiry to establish a 'Media Village' on the strategic reserve site south of Seaham which had undertaken pre-planning

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public consultations along with English Partnerships/Network Space Initiative proposed for the Murton Colliery site. Planning submissions were anticipated for both of the schemes prior to the New Year.

The NRF allocations made to the District had been successfully allocated for 2006/2008 period and monitoring of progress was underway. NRF expenditure was balanced to within 0.5% of the budget for the financial year 06/07. The annual allocation for 07/08 period was £6,067,583. At the end of quarter 2, expenditure was balanced in an overspend position of 1.6% above profile.

Work was ongoing with the major projects team to maximise single programme funding for major projects developing in the District. The work would inform future capital needs for the District. The work was continuing and would help inform the draft Regeneration Statement for East Durham and the draft Sub-Regional Economic Strategy for County Durham.

The 'Healthworks' in Paradise Lane, Easington Colliery was official opened on 5 November 2007. The partnership based project included significant private sector investment as well as support from the PCT, Police, Council, LSP and Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder. The Easington and Horden Pathfinder Sub-Team had been located alongside other partner bodies and stakeholders in the neighbourhood management process.

The North Peterlee Sub Team relocated to a temporary office base within Lee House from October 2007. The short term tenancy was due to lapse at the end of the financial year to coincide with their move to new build premises at Edenhill.

Details were also given in the report relating to policy, promotion and planning. Work had been undertaken to support emerging regeneration policy for the benefit of the District.

A Member asked for more information on the Peterlee and Durham Coalfield work. The Director of Regeneration and Partnership explained that the work had stemmed from concern about low demand for housing. English Partnerships had suggested putting together a strategy for refreshing the housing markets for private sector owner occupied properties. The Housing Renewal Programme included all District Councils in the County except Teesdale. The sub-regional study economic rationale was to improve economic well being of communities. There was to be a major study of new housing markets from major centres in East Durham.

The first phase of interventions was to be Easington District, Sedgefield and Wear Valley and a business case had to be completed to forward to the Treasury to secure funding. Housing renewal would focus on Easington Colliery and some work in Dawdon and then would move to Horden in Phase 2 in approximately 5-10 years.

A Member explained that the last meeting of the Peterlee Regeneration Member Panel had been cancelled because there was no business to be transacted. He had heard rumours that there was to be a new supermarket on the North Blunts site and queried if any developments had taken place on the East Durham and Houghall College Town Centre site.

The Director of Regeneration and Development explained that North Blunts site was owned by Durham County Council although the District Council owned a

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small piece of land. The District Council had been approached from a developer to query if a supermarket would be suitable on the site and discussions and negotiations were ongoing. The College Town Centre site had a planning permission attached to it, amended plans would have to be submitted if there were to be any changes.

The Director of Regeneration and Development explained that the meeting of the Peterlee Regeneration Member Panel had been cancelled in consultation with the Chair. The Panel had been set up to consider the Master Plan proposals and the regeneration of Peterlee. There would be periods of time when there was not much to report to Members because negotiations and discussions were ongoing. The Master Plan and the strategic approach had been agreed and there was a lot of legal agreements to be signed. Meetings would be held when there was significant developments to report to Members.

The Chair referred to the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder that was extended to part of Peterlee but they seemed to be working as two organisations. The Regeneration Initiatives Manager explained that they were not allowed to work as one organisation and the funding was exclusively for North Peterlee. The expertise gained in the Easington Colliery and Horden Pathfinder had been drawn upon for North Peterlee.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their report.

RESOLVED that the information given be noted.

7. **ANY ADDITIONAL URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS**

In accordance with the Local Government Act, 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, Section 100B(4)(b) the Chair, following consultation with the Proper Officer, agreed that following item of business, not shown on the Agenda, be considered as a matter of urgency.

8. **"BIG CONVERSATION" (AOB)**

The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that County Durham PCT was to hold a public meeting in Wheatley Hill Community Centre at 10.00am on Tuesday 4 December 2007. The reason for the event was to help develop plans for health and health care for the next five years. He was not aware of any other events being held in the District. If any Member was interested in attending they should contact him before the end of the week for places to be booked.

RESOLVED that the information given be noted.

JC/CB/COM/RSSC/071101
21.11.07