

Economic Prosperity Sub Committee

Tuesday, 25 January 2022

Present: Councillor M Wilson (Chair)
Councillors L Bones, T Brady, M Hall, J Harrison,
Janet Hunter, B Pickard, W Samuel, J Walker and
G Westwater

Apologies: Councillors H Johnson

21/21 Appointment of Substitute Members

There were no substitute members appointed.

22/21 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

23/21 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 30 November 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

24/21 Town Centres

Paul Dowling, Graham Sword and Sean Collier from the Council's Regeneration and Economic Development Team attended the meeting to update the sub-committee on work to support the development of the Borough's town and retail centres.

Reference was made to the key issues and findings to emerge from a sub group, appointed by the sub-committee in 2019, to examine the future of retail and town centres. Members heard how these issues had been addressed by the Council, driven by its Covid-19 town centre response and recovery programmes, its Ambition for North Tyneside, the formulation and delivery of the North Shields Masterplan and the development of masterplans for the North West, Wallsend and Whitley Bay. The sub-committee were also presented with the latest data relating to footfall and vacant properties in each town centre and the outcome of a survey of businesses and customers about their perceptions of the town centres. Charts were displayed at the meeting showing the location of vacant properties and the mix of uses in North Shields, Wallsend and Whitley Bay town centres.

The sub-committee were invited to reflect on the extent to which the recommendations contained in its earlier report had been delivered and to make comments on any key lessons or important factors to be taken into account when developing masterplans for the North West, Wallsend and Whitley Bay. During their discussion members considered the following key issues:

a) recognition that the north west of the borough did not have one single identifiable town

centre. Whilst the privately owned Killingworth Shopping Centre had been designed to be at the centre of the Killingworth, outlying communities retained their own separate identity, supported their own local shops and were likely to be drawn to neighbouring centres such as Newcastle and Cramlington due to the transport networks. Any masterplan for the area would have to identify what links the separate communities, engage with them so that they would buy-in to a broader plan or create separate plans for each community;

- b) the possibility of using automatic number plate recognition technology and public transport usage to analyse the origins of those using town centres;
- c) the detrimental impact on the appearance and perceptions of a town centre caused by clusters of property in a poor state of repair such as the North end of Whitley Road, Whitley Bay;
- d) the need for adequate broadband and other technological infrastructure as a prerequisite to converting retail property for alternative uses such as office space;
- e) the cost, availability and convenience of car parking in Wallsend and North Shields;
- f) the potential for more housing development in town centres;
- g) the need to involve young people in solving the problems, identifying their needs and shaping what their town centres will look like in 2040;
- h) the need to improve the quality of the leisure offer in town centres to increase the duration of visits;
- i) the importance of building a consensus and a shared vision with businesses, partners and communities for the regeneration of town centres.

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation and he hoped that the points raised during the meeting may help inform the future development of town centre masterplans.

25/21 The State of the North Tyneside Economy

The sub-committee was presented with data which provided an indication of the state of the economy in North Tyneside. The data included the numbers of people claiming Universal Credit, the number of employments furloughed, the town centre vacancy rate, numbers of job advertisements, levels of earnings and qualifications within the population and new business start-ups. Some of data was also compared with other regions across England.

The sub-committee asked whether future reports could include:

- a) local data relating to the numbers of sole traders setting up in business to provide a broader picture of business start ups;
- b) the rates of vacant properties in retail parks such as Royal Quays and Sliverlink; and
- c) the number of apprenticeships.

Members also considered the reasons for the apparent disparity between the high numbers of job vacancies and the continuing high rate of unemployment. This may have been attributable to a large number of people temporarily transferring from one employment sector to another and the situation may settle over time. It was also noted that data had been provided by Job Centre Plus who may not necessarily have a complete overall picture of the labour market due to reporting changes and the growth of on line recruitment agencies.