

Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 16 October 2023

Present:

Councillor Johns – in the Chair

Councillors Benham, Hussain, Iqbal, Northwood, Richards, I Robinson, Shilton Godwin and Taylor

Also present:

Councillor White, Executive Member for Housing and Development

Councillor Hughes, Ward Councillor for Gorton and Abbey Hey

Councillor Reid, Ward Councillor for Gorton and Abbey Hey

Apologies:

Councillor Abdullatif

ERSC/23/39 Minute's Silence

The Committee held a minute's silence to mark the tragic events in Israel and Palestine.

ERSC/23/40 Minutes

Decision

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2023 be approved as a correct record.

ERSC/23/41 Update on the activities and initiatives to support and develop District Centres

The Committee received a report of the Director of Development and Director of Communities which provided information on the activities and initiatives to support and develop District Centres. The report described the progress to date following the findings and recommendations of the District Centres Subgroup, and included an update on the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF).

Key points and themes within the report included:

- Background information;
- The District Centre programme;
- Other activity relating to District Centres; and
- The Shared Prosperity Fund.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development welcomed that the meeting was being held in Gorton to enable Members to see one of the city's district centres and the investment that was taking place. He highlighted some of the challenges that district centres had faced and their importance to the city and Manchester residents.

Councillor Hughes, Ward Councillor for Gorton and Abbey Hey, spoke positively about Gorton Hub, which he reported was very well-used and provided a one-stop shop for everything that people needed, commenting that every ward should have one.

Councillor Reid, Ward Councillor for Gorton and Abbey Hey, reported that she was a member of the Hub's Strategic Board. She outlined some of the challenges that had been faced in establishing the Hub, the benefits of having multiple agencies based in the same building and working together and some of work that was still in progress, including the GP surgery moving in, establishing a café in the Hub, getting the top floor of the building fully occupied and sufficiency of car parking. In response to a question from the Chair about what she would like to see next for Gorton district centre, she stated that she would like to see more partners moving into the Hub and for it to be fully utilised and have a buzz about it every day. She highlighted how well used the library within the Hub was and reported that it would be used as a Warm Hub again this winter. Noting the levels of unemployment and lower levels of qualifications in the area, she highlighted that Manchester Adult Education Service (MAES) were based in the building but advised that more courses should be available from this site. The Chair commented that this issue could be discussed further when the Committee considered an item on Work and Skills later in the municipal year.

A Member commented on the challenges of bringing partner agencies together to create something like Gorton Hub, including the challenges relating to NHS Capital Funding, but emphasised that it was important to do this work in order to create something which met the needs of local residents.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development reported that the Council had learnt a lot from this and other projects about working together with partner agencies, emphasising the importance of getting everyone involved from the start of the process. He informed Members that the establishment of Gorton Hub had increased footfall in the district centre. He stated that the Council's role was as an enabler of these kind of projects and that it would try to access funding from a range of sources but that these projects could not be achieved without the involvement of other partners. He reported that more housing was needed in Gorton and other district centres.

The Strategic Director (Growth and Development) highlighted the importance of health provision, education provision and other social infrastructure, noting that the city's population had grown considerably, putting demand on existing services. She advised that an assessment of the broader infrastructure requirements was underway and that, with major projects like Victoria North, the Council was doing what it could to plan this infrastructure from the outset; however, the situation was more complex where there was incremental growth in an area.

The District Centres Programme Manager delivered a presentation which provided an overview of the work on district centres, including specific details of the work in relation to Moston Lane, Wythenshawe, Strangeways and Gorton.

Key points and queries that arose from the Committee's discussions included:

- To welcome the progress made on this work, including the depth, breadth and geographical spread of the activity, and that it involved a deep dive understanding of a place;
- The importance of the co-location of public sector partners, the private sector and housing and what levers the Council had to achieve this;
- That footfall data was very useful and could it be shared more widely;
- The importance of getting the basics right, such as street cleaning, repairing uneven pavements and broken signage and people feeling safe;
- The importance of improved public transport, noting the opportunity that bus franchising offered;
- Were predicted demographics taken into account when determining what housing would be built and what facilities an area would need;
- The amount of work being placed on Neighbourhood Teams and the range of different duties they were expected to cover and whether some of the engagement work with and support for traders should be carried out by a different team; and
- Funding risks and challenges.

The Director of Strategic Housing and Development outlined how the establishment of Gorton Hub had helped to break down barriers with public sector partners and reported that a pipeline of locations for investment was now being mapped out, particularly in areas of population growth. He reported that the Council was also able to use surplus buildings and available land as levers to get other organisations on board. The Strategic Director (Growth and Development) highlighted the role of Strategic Regeneration Frameworks, as having a clear vision enabled the Council to align partners behind it and have early-stage discussions. She stated that the private sector would invest where there was certainty about what was being brought forward. She acknowledged the Member's point about sharing the footfall data more widely and stated that officers would look into how this could be done.

The Director of Communities reported that additional investment had been made, including on cleansing in district centres and the city centre, and that Ward Councillors would have influence of how additional spending for their ward was allocated.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development acknowledged a Member's comments about Levelling Up Funding, commenting that Manchester had not had much success in the first two rounds of funding. He reported that the Council had invested in District Centres Programme Managers and that Work and Skills Teams were engaging with businesses across the city, providing support and access to grants and funding. He informed the Committee about the range of data used to inform the Council's plans, including consultation with residents and Ward Councillors. In response to a Member's question about gathering additional data on footfall, such as where people were travelling from and the purpose of their visit, he advised that more work would be needed to understand this better, while commenting that some data could be gathered from other assets such as Libraries, which undertook surveys and gathered information on people accessing their services. He acknowledged a Member's comments about the importance of having opportunities for smaller independent traders to grow and develop, for example,

starting on a market stall, and about campaigns to encourage people to support small local businesses.

The Strategic Director (Growth and Development) reported that at the start of a piece of work on a Neighbourhood Development Framework or Strategic Regeneration Framework, the Council would undertake an analysis of the current socio-demographics of the area and adjacent areas. She recognised Members' comments on transport, highlighting the introduction of the Active Travel Strategy the previous year and reporting that a City Centre Movement Plan was being developed. She stated that transport across and beyond the city would also need to be looked at, commenting that the plan over time was to see a reduction in car usage and the need for car parking but that public transport had to be reliable, efficient and affordable, with bus franchising providing a good opportunity to address this. She acknowledged a Member's comments on the importance of good communication, including during periods when there might not be much visible progress, for example, while the Council was working to identify a development partner, and advised that discussions were taking place with the Communications Team about this. In response to a Member's question, she provided an update on the Shared Prosperity Fund and reported that the Council had been informed that there would be a third round of Levelling Up funding and that the Council would want clarity on the criteria but would do whatever it could to access available funding streams. In response to a question from the Chair, she reported that a Retail and Leisure Study would be undertaken as part of the Local Plan and that this would include a review of how District Centres were defined. In response to further questions, she advised that, while an analysis of need and demand for development-led interventions was undertaken, consideration also had to be given to where the Council had land assets and was in position to deliver the plan.

A Member requested that a future update include a deep dive comparison between a district centre which had a Development Framework and one which was being proactively supported by the Neighbourhood Team.

Decisions:

1. To note the report.
2. To receive an update report in the next municipal year, including a deep dive comparison between a district centre which has a Development Framework and one which is being proactively supported by the Neighbourhood Team.

ERSC/23/42 Strategic Regeneration Frameworks and Neighbourhood Development Frameworks Overview

The Committee received a report of the Director of City Centre Growth and Infrastructure and the Director of Strategic Housing and Development which provided an overview of the role, purpose and process of producing Strategic Regeneration Frameworks (SRFs) and Neighbourhood Development Frameworks (NDFs) for different areas of the city. It also provided some case studies of SRFs and a list of existing and upcoming SRFs and NDFs.

Key points and themes within the report included:

- Background information;
- SRF/NDF overview;
- Case studies; and
- Summary list of all existing and developing SRF/NDF.

Key points and queries that arose from the Committee's discussions included:

- Developer-led and Council-led frameworks, including how particular areas were chosen for Council-led frameworks and whether there were any opportunities to influence these decisions;
- Consultations, including ensuring that these were meaningful in relation to developer-led frameworks, changing residents' perceptions, where they believed that these were just tickbox exercises, and ensuring that all communities were reached, noting the number of people in the city who spoke languages other than English;
- Monitoring progress; and
- Ensuring that development helped to address inequality and child poverty in the city.

In response to a Member's question, the Strategic Director (Growth and Development) reported that SRFs were usually of a larger-scale geographically and delivered over a number of phases, such as Victoria North. She informed Members that Council-led frameworks were usually determined through need and opportunity; however, where frameworks were developer-led, the Council still played an active role in determining what was acceptable in a particular area. She advised that consultations were meaningful but that there were parameters for some sites, for example, if a site was a key strategic employment location, it would not be changed to a different use, for example, a public park, but consultation responses would be taken into account, for example, in terms of public spaces within the area. In response to a further question, she outlined the mechanisms used to consult with residents. She confirmed that progress was monitored, although in some cases frameworks could be refreshed due to changing circumstances, outlining changes in relation to Central Retail Park, which a Member had referenced. She reported that the opportunity to purchase land assets was a key factor in deciding to initiate a Council-led framework in a particular area. She recognised the Member's point about the pressure that multiple developments happening at the same time could put on communities and outlined work that was done to minimise disruption, including the phasing of developments and clear communication to residents. She reported that SRFs and NDFs were useful for attracting funding and that having projects in the pipeline meant that, when funding was announced, the city had projects ready to go. In response to a question from the Chair, she reported that, when a refreshed framework was brought to scrutiny or the Executive, the reasons for the refresh were set out; however, she acknowledged that residents might not see this information and that it was important to maintain good lines of communication with communities about what was happening in their area and the reasons for any changes. The Chair asked whether people who had previously responded to a consultation could be kept updated. The Strategic Director (Growth and Development) reported that she would look into this.

In response to a Member's comments on consultations and co-design, the Director of Strategic Housing and Development provided an example of how residents' views had informed the plans for Moston Lane.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development advised that, particularly on brownfield sites and where there were a number of planning applications in the pipeline over a number of years, it was useful to have a framework in place so that planning decisions were not made in isolation. He recognised a Member's point about the impact of developments on neighbouring wards and the importance of good communication and consultation with Ward Councillors in those wards, noting that meetings were due to take place in relation to the specific area the Member was referring to. He acknowledged the importance of engaging with all communities across the city through a range of methods, such as providing information in community languages, and engaging with people through community groups. He also supported a Member's comments about addressing inequality and poverty, stating that the Council wanted to use the tools it had to address this, including providing social and affordable housing and local jobs. The Strategic Director (Growth and Development) advised that it was important to have clear social value expectations from the outset, including jobs, supply chains, apprenticeships, work with schools and community facilities and to monitor this closely.

The Chair commented that short, easy-to-read summaries were important when consulting with residents.

In response to a question from the Chair about Section 106 funding, the Executive Member for Housing and Development drew Members' attention to a report on this which had been considered at a meeting of the Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee the previous week and reported that this was part of the planning process rather than directly part of the SRF but that the Council was committed to getting the most value possible out of this funding.

The Strategic Director (Growth and Development) reported that there was a weekly email to Ward Councillors listing planning applications, that Members could also register to be informed about developments in their ward and that developers were actively encouraged to engage with Ward Councillors prior to submitting their application. She outlined the planning process, including Section 106 funding, highlighting that this funding was to mitigate the impact of the development so there were restrictions on what it could be used for. The Director of Strategic Housing and Development clarified that Section 106 monies compensating for affordable housing were ringfenced to be spent only on affordable housing.

Decisions:

1. To note the report.
2. To request a further report on the evaluation and monitoring of SRFs.

ERSC/23/43 Victoria North - Strategic Business Plan Refresh

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Growth and Development) which provided a high-level summary of the refreshed Victoria North Strategic Business Plan. The report included updates on progress made since the Strategic Business Plan was approved by Executive, and scrutinised by this Committee, in February 2020. This included an update on progress made in delivering the 988 homes covered by the Initial Development Area Business Plan, in addition to a look ahead to the next Development Area Business Plan, together with a summary of the high-level opportunities, challenges and risks associated with the overall programme.

Key points and themes within the report included:

- Governance, decision-making and scrutiny;
- Strategic Business Plan – Joint Venture progress to date;
- Key themes of the refreshed Strategic Business Plan;
- Affordable housing;
- Strategic Investment Plan;
- Infrastructure interventions and Delivery Strategy;
- Delivering social value;
- Social and Community Infrastructure Strategy; and
- Contributing to a Zero Carbon City.

Key points and queries that arose from the Committee's discussions included:

- Solutions to address flooding risks;
- Concerns of existing residents, including about the risk of losing their communities;
- How this work would be monitored to ensure that the project was meeting its original goals, noting that this project would take around 15 years to be fully implemented;
- Was dentistry being considered as one of the amenities that would be needed; and
- Social value including whether information could be provided on whether this enabled residents to access jobs across the income distribution.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Executive Member for Housing and Development clarified that the intention was to deliver 5% affordable housing through planning and a further 15% through grant funding from Homes England. He confirmed that the levels of affordable housing were being monitored throughout the project and that this would be reported back to this Committee and through other channels. He acknowledged the point about considering access to dentistry for future Victoria North residents.

The Assistant Director (Major Regeneration) reported that, following geological issues with the original plan to remove a weir in the River Irk, the plan was now to deliver on-plot flood solutions. He outlined how the Council was working with the Environment Agency on this, finding practical solutions to dissipate the issue without displacing the problem elsewhere, while trying to take as many properties as possible out of a flood zone altogether and take all properties out of flood zone 3.

The Strategic Director (Growth and Development) reported that the Victoria North Board met quarterly and monitored progress and that every phase of the project was subject to a business plan which was refreshed annually and closely monitored. She reported that there was a guarantee that anyone who was going to lose their home due to the regeneration of the area would be found a replacement home which met their needs. She acknowledged the Member's comment about residents' existing communities and outlined how residents in Collyhurst were actively involved in the plans for the area, emphasising the importance of two-way communication. The Executive Member for Housing and Development reported that the Local Lettings Policy would give priority to people with a local connection and that, while plans for Collyhurst could see the number of homes in the area increase from approximately 600 to 3000, he emphasised that the existing communities were at the heart of the scheme and helping to shape plans for their area.

In response to comments from the Chair about new primary schools opening in phases, rather than offering places in all school years from the outset, and the challenges this presented for families moving into the area if they had children of different ages, the Executive Member for Housing and Development stated that he would discuss this with Education colleagues, who they were working closely with in relation to school provision for Victoria North.

The Victoria North Strategy and Coordination Lead reported that the four existing schools in this part of the city, two of which were Roman Catholic, one of which was Church of England and one which was a community school, currently had spare capacity, although they were all one-form entry schools. He reported that work would take place with Education colleagues and existing schools to identify a strategy to provide sufficient school places as the area's population started to grow. In response to the question about social value, he informed Members about the North Manchester Social Benefits Framework, advising that the intention was to have a more outcome-focussed and person-centred approach, although he acknowledged that it would be challenging to find a way to monitor the ongoing progress of a Manchester resident after they had started work. The Chair stated that this could be discussed further when the Committee considered the item on Social Value and the Economy at its December meeting.

Decisions:

1. To note the summarised content of the refreshed Victoria North Strategic Business Plan.
2. To endorse the refreshed Victoria North Strategic Business Plan.
3. To note the general programme update.

[Councillor Richards declared a personal and prejudicial interest in this item due to her involvement in the Joint Venture Board and some of the decision-making on Victoria North during her time as an Executive Member and left the room for this item.]

ERSC/23/44 Overview Report

A report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit was submitted. The overview report contained key decisions within the Committee's remit, responses to previous recommendations and the Committee's work programme, which the Committee was asked to approve.

The Chair drew Members' attention to the revised work programme for the rest of the municipal year. He advised that, following a request for a report on the Shared Prosperity Fund, it had been decided that information on this would be incorporated into relevant reports on the Committee's work programme, rather than the Committee receiving a discrete report on this.

Referring to the minutes of the Committee's September meeting, he asked that a Member's request for a figure of the cost of bringing homes in the city up to the required standard be added to the recommendations monitor. He also asked that a report on Fairer Access to Finance be added as an item to be scheduled on the work programme. He thanked officers for facilitating the meeting taking place at Gorton Hub.

Decision:

That the Committee note the report and agree the work programme, subject to the above comments.