

Economy Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 13 October 2022

Present:

Councillor Johns (Chair) – in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Good, Moran, Noor, I Robinson and Shilton Godwin

Also present:

Councillor White, Executive Member for Housing and Development

Councillor Rawlins, Executive Member for Environment and Transport

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Judge

Councillor Lynch

Councillor Newman

Apologies: Councillor Raikes and Taylor

ESC/22/38 Minutes

Decision:

That the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 8 September 2022, be approved as a correct record.

ESC/22/39 District Centres

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director of Growth and Development and the Director of Development which provided an update on regeneration, investment and development programmes focused on several district centres across the city.

The key points and themes within the report included:

- Manchester has 17 designated district centres within its Local Plan and each centre is distinctly individual, with a variety of economic and social characteristics;
- Funding opportunities available to kickstart district centre regeneration and investment, such as GMCA's Brownfield Housing Fund and Evergreen Fund, Levelling Up Funding, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Council's Affordable Housing Programme;
- Works undertaken in Wythenshawe, Moston Lane, Gorton and Chorlton;
- The planned programme for future works and investment in Strangeways, Cheetham Hill, Harpurhey and Newton Heath; and
- As part of investment into district centres, Small Business Roadshows were held in Moston, Withington and Longsight and concentrated on digital skills, upskilling employees, financial training and wider business community networking.

In introducing the item, the Chair informed those present that each district centre would be focused on in turn with an opportunity to ask questions regarding each area. The Chair had also received statements from local ward members and would relay these at the appropriate time in proceedings.

The Chair also explained that members of the committee had undertaken a site visit in Wythenshawe town centre with officers and local ward members prior to the meeting and acknowledged the opportunities available.

The key points and queries that arose from the Committee's discussion on the general approach to district centres included:

- The strong sense of pride and community across Manchester;
- The need to consider permeability, accessibility, good signage, the quality of the public realm and cleanliness in district centres;
- How digitally-excluded residents will be consulted;
- Plans for additional Small Business Roadshows and whether these could be held in specific areas;
- The importance of the Business, People and Skills theme within the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF);
- Requesting an update on the progress of government discussions about SPF funding;
- Footfall monitors, and whether this data is shared with businesses;
- What support was available for the hospitality industry following the pandemic from both central and local government; and
- How the order of district centre works was prioritised and whether this is *need-led* or *opportunity-led*.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development highlighted the significant work that had been undertaken to improve district centres across Manchester and the value of the Institute of Place Management and the District Centres Subgroup's work.

The Committee was informed that common issues for district centres included footfall, residential provisions and diverse offers. It was acknowledged that the high street had changed as a consequence of a rise in online and out-of-town shopping.

Members were advised that the next Small Business Roadshow would be held in Hulme and that requests for other locations would be relayed to the Work and Skills team, who are eager to extend this to other areas.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development concurred with the need to share data on footfall with local businesses and explained that this had happened in Withington and resulted in some businesses changing their opening hours to when the district centre was busiest.

In response to queries regarding the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), the Strategic Director for Growth and Development explained that funding through the Business, People and Skills theme would be administered by Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and funding based on Skills was scheduled to be assessed towards the end of the SPF programme. Bid rounds would open in due course over

the next few years and both GMCA and Manchester City Council would work to protect valuable services and maximise the use of resources across Greater Manchester.

The Head of Neighbourhood Management recognised that not all residents had access to the internet to take part in consultations and advised that Neighbourhood teams understood the communities they worked in and had strong networks to provide a multi-form way of communicating plans.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development explained that support for the hospitality industry was available during the COVID pandemic but this had ended. The Executive Member supported the industry's calls for further intervention on business rates and VAT. The 6-month energy cap for businesses was welcomed but it was felt to not provide security for an appropriate amount of time.

The Strategic Director of Growth and Development also highlighted that The Growth Company offered an advice service for businesses and would circulate further information on this.

With regards to whether district centre works were *need-led* or *opportunity-led*, it was reiterated that a 'one size fits all' approach was not being taken. Some district centres had strong business or community networks and required Council support and empowerment to achieve their vision whereas others required deeper interventions to facilitate improvements.

It was stated that areas of deprivation and in need of support were identified in all Council decisions.

The Strategic Director of Growth and Development also advised that the schedule of improvements to district centres was devised through analysis of need, demand and opportunity and that where the Council had levers, such as land assets, a stronger basis for intervention was possible.

Decision:

That the report be noted.

a) **Wythenshawe**

The Committee was addressed by Councillors Eddy Newman and Astrid Johnson, ward members for Woodhouse Park, and Councillor Tommy Judge, ward member for Sharston. They raised issues including the history of Wythenshawe Civic Centre, their hopes for its regeneration, and asked questions regarding housing, active travel, and consultation processes.

The key points and queries that arose from the committee's discussion on Wythenshawe town centre included:

- Requesting an update on progress with Levelling Up Funding (LUF), and when a final decision on this was expected;

- How much of the LUF bid was capital funding and how much was revenue funding;
- Whether discussions had taken place with developers to identify alternative funding mechanisms should the LUF bid be unsuccessful;
- Housing plans for the area, what constituted 'mixed tenure' and whether this will include social housing;
- Acknowledging the challenges of a '*night-time economy*' and how these issues would be addressed;
- Whether sufficient education provisions were available to support increased housing development;
- Opportunities to incorporate nature-based solutions and meet zero carbon targets through regeneration schemes;
- The need for sufficiently-powered Electrical Vehicle charging points, and the percentage of provisions within the scheme;
- The impact of inflation in the construction industry on the scheme's budget; and
- The need to ensure an appropriate and socially-beneficial retail offer.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development reiterated the committee's comments on the importance of infrastructure and highlighted the reopening of Newall Green High School which would help to provide school places in Wythenshawe.

The Executive Member also acknowledged the opportunity to establish a '*night-time economy*' in Wythenshawe and explained that safety could be promoted and managed through planning and licensing regulations.

The Strategic Director of Growth and Development explained that the Council was identifying various workstreams to ensure that sustainability and biodiversity are factored into the new proposals for Wythenshawe town centre.

The Director of Development commented that the second round of Levelling Up funding was currently underway and a decision on whether this will be awarded to the Council was expected by the end of 2022. Some queries from central government had been received in respect of the Council's bid, which the Director of Development advised was a good sign.

In response to a query regarding how much of the LUF bid was capital funding and how much was revenue funding, the figures were not available to share at the meeting but assurances were provided that a robust financial management plan was in place to cover Council fees, operational costs and the necessary external resources.

The Executive Member for Environment and Transport advised the committee, in response to a query around Electrical Vehicle charging points, that a report on the Council's Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy was due to be considered by the Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee and the Executive in December 2022.

Assurances were provided that a minimum of 20% of the 1500 homes planned to be built in Wythenshawe would be affordable, as per the Council's policy, and the Executive Member for Housing and Development expressed hope that this figure would increase. Discussions with partners around affordable housing were underway and members were advised that there was 16,000 council and social rent homes in Wythenshawe already and that housing providers can access various funding schemes such as Homes England funding and brownfield land funding to develop affordable rent, social rent and shared ownership homes.

Private market sale and private rent homes would also be available to ensure mixed tenure within the town centre.

The Director of Development provided assurances that the Council was conscious of cost inflation when creating the LUF bid and that this included provisions for inflation, optimism bias and contingencies with officers confident that the budget would allow delivery of the bid's aspirations.

Assurances were also provided that, because the Council would be the landlord of retail spaces, it would have the power and oversight to prohibit unsavoury businesses operating within the shopping centre.

b) **Moston Lane**

In introducing the item, the Chair informed the committee that Councillor Julie Connolly, ward councillor for Moston, had provide a written representation and was supportive of the proposals.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development commented that Moston Lane was a vibrant shopping centre in North Manchester but acknowledged some challenges and opportunities to diversify land and housing assets.

Funding had been received from the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), which would help to improve green space and neighbourhoods.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development informed members that long-term aspirations included further housing development and increasing job opportunities within Moston.

In response to a query regarding the status of the SPF funding, the Strategic Director of Growth and Development explained that SPF was split into three themes – Communities and Place, Supporting Businesses, and Skills and Employment. The Communities and Place theme was devolved to local authorities from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and consisted of £5 million for Manchester City Council. Proposals are submitted to GMCA with the final sign-off from government.

The Council was currently awaiting formal approval of the funding for Moston Lane but there had been no indication that the proposals did not meet the criteria for SPF funding.

c) **Gorton**

In introducing the item, the Chair informed the committee that Councillor Julie Reid, John Hughes and Afia Kamal, ward councillors for Gorton and Abbey Hey, had provided a written representation which highlighted recent and ongoing positive developments, including a GP surgery, library and job centre, within Gorton.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development welcomed the opening of the Gorton Hub and informed members of the popularity of Gorton Market which had an opportunity to develop a frontage to the high street.

d) **Withington**

In introducing the item, the Chair informed the committee that Councillor Angela Gartside, ward councillor for Withington, had provided a written question regarding when the safer streets scheme would be delivered.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development responded that significant active travel investment had occurred in Withington and cited the Didsbury-Manchester segregated cycleway as an example. It was confirmed that safer streets scheme was out for consultation and had not been fully delivered but there was a strong commitment to this.

It was also explained that Withington was well served by the bus and tram network and it was anticipated that the Beryl Bikes scheme would be extended to Withington in the future.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development acknowledged that district centres needed to be well served by public transport and that there are safe walking and cycle routes.

A recent LUF bid for Withington had been unsuccessful but the Executive Member for Housing and Development commented that lessons had been learnt.

In response to a query regarding what this learning included and how this could be applied to future bids and works to district centres, the Strategic Director for Growth and Development informed members that the Council received positive feedback on the LUF bid for Withington. It was recognised that the proposed investment into public realm and what this would deliver did not meet the expectations of the Department for Transport (DfT).

It was stated that some of the works proposed within the LUF bid, such as Withington Baths, had progressed with Shared Prosperity Funding.

e) **Chorlton**

The key points and queries that arose from the committee's discussion on Chorlton district centre included:

- Acknowledging Chorlton as an active community with a strong identity;

- Referencing the 'night-time economy' in Chorlton and how this was sometimes at the detriment of the 'daytime economy';
- Interest from local residents and community groups to attract investment; and
- The need to implement sustainable active travel routes.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development recognised ongoing work in Chorlton and the need to evaluate the wider impact of this across the area. Meetings between Chorlton Vision and local councillors were taking place to assess several sites which would help to deliver hundreds of new homes and reinvigorate the district centre.

Positive housing developments, including at Chorlton Baths, were recognised and welcomed.

f) **Cheetham Hill and Strangeways**

The key points and queries that arose from the committee's discussion on Cheetham Hill and Strangeways district centres included:

- Where the opportunity in Strangeways was emerging from and what were the driving forces behind this; and
- Illegitimate and fraudulent businesses in Strangeways and what could be done to prevent these being established.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development explained that a new college facility and housing had been developed in Strangeways but challenges around crime and antisocial behaviour in the area were well-documented.

A masterplan for the area and engagement with local members was anticipated to expand the improvements in the city centre into Cheetham and Strangeways.

The Strategic Director for Growth and Development noted that works to district centres was not a 'one size fits all' approach and acknowledged the particular issues affecting the Strangeways area. Members were advised that works in Strangeways and Cheetham were in their early stages.

The Council would look at its landholdings and assets within the area to identify opportunities and demand for housing and business. The Strategic Director for Growth and Development recognised that a multi-agency approach was needed in Strangeways and Cheetham but the Council had levers over freehold land in the area. The Council's Neighbourhoods team can identify breaches in the licences for these sites and escalate this to the Enforcement team.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development added that the Council had recently shut down some businesses engaging in fraudulent or illegal activity in partnership with other agencies.

The Executive Member reiterated the need for positive aspects within the community and cited the school, college and affordable housing within Strangeways and Cheetham as examples.

g) **Harpurhey**

In introducing the item, the Chair informed members that Councillor Pat Karney, ward member for Harpurhey, was in support of the works outlined in the report.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development advised the Committee that there are 10 footfall monitors in district centres across the city to identify trends. Recent data indicated that district centres had recovered from the pandemic quicker than the city centre in terms of footfall and Harpurhey was recognised as a popular, resilient district centre.

h) **Newton Heath**

In introducing the item, the Chair informed members that Councillor June Hitchen, ward member for Miles Platting and Newton Heath, had submitted a question regarding future plans for improving Old Church Street in Newton Heath.

In response to this, the Executive Member for Housing and Development advised that much of the Newton Heath's district centre was privately-owned and this made improving shop fronts challenging. The Council would work to ensure that businesses in Newton Heath and across the city were viable and that owners had the ability to invest in their business. It was explained that whilst there are some grants for these works, these are not always available and can be competitive.

It was hoped that improvements to district centres would increase viability and encourage business owners to reinvest profits into the district centre.

The Executive Member for Housing and Development explained that significant investment was going into Newton Heath with the Silk Street development, which consisted of 69 social-rent, low-carbon homes adjacent to Newton Heath district centre and the canal.

It was suggested that the Silk Street development highlighted the opportunity to increase housing within district centres and subsequently improve viability and footfall.

ESC/22/40 Overview Report

The Chair informed members that the Work Programme for November 2022 would be amended to add the word 'Update' to the Poverty Strategy report.

It was also clarified with regards to the response to a previous recommendation that a subgroup be established on housing retrofit that a formal task and finish group would not have been the right approach and that the quarterly policy panel, which was already established, was best placed to assess and develop the retrofit programme.

It was also agreed that a report providing an overview and update on the work of Shared Prosperity Funding would be added to the Committee's Work Programme.

