

WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL

NOTES OF A MEETING OF THE SHEERWATER REGENERATION OVERSIGHT PANEL

HELD ON 27 JUNE 2018 IN THE BOARD ROOM - CIVIC OFFICES

Present: Councillor Kevin Davis
Councillor Tahir Aziz
Councillor David Bittleston
Councillor Ian Eastwood
Councillor Colin Kemp
Councillor Louise Morales
Ray Morgan
Sue Barham
Peter Bryant
Paola Capel-Williams
Zafar Iqbal
Hazel Craig-Walker

Absent: Councillor Mohammad Ali
Councillor Amanda Boote
Councillor Saj Hussain
Councillor M Ilyas Raja

1. Election of Chairman

Councillor Eastwood nominated and Councillor Kemp seconded the election of Councillor Davis as Chairman of the Oversight Panel for the Municipal Year.

RESOLVED That Councillor K Davis be elected
Chairman for the Municipal Year.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Boote and M I Raja.

3. Sheerwater Regeneration Project Update

It was noted that the report on the Equality Impact Assessment Action Plan had been circulated late to the Members of the Oversight Panel and the Chairman expressed concern that the Members of the Panel had not received sufficient time to review the report. Ray advised that the EIA Action Plan had been considered by Council earlier in the year at which all Members had been given the opportunity to consider the recommendations. The report before the Oversight Panel included additional comments by Officers on the implementation of the Action Plan and was considered a 'live' document, updated at regular intervals.

General Update

Ray provided the Oversight Panel with an overview of the progress of the Regeneration Scheme, informing them that the planning application was being reviewed by Planning Officers. No material issues in respect of the Planning application had been flagged up. Ray noted that the notifications sent to residents in respect of amendments to the application could have caused some confusion, and advised that Officers were looking at options to simplify the approach.

A new edition of the Sheerwater newsletter was being drawn up to update the residents on a number of matters in respect of the Regeneration Scheme. The draft newsletter would be discussed further later in the meeting.

Equality Impact Assessment Action Plan

(NOTE: In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor Morales declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of the discussion on the role of the Parkview Centre and venues for hire. The interest arose from her position as member of the Old Woking Community Centre, a venue which provided rooms for hire, and was such that speaking and voting were permissible.)

Peter Bryant advised the Members of the Oversight Panel that in October 2017 Woking Borough Council had commissioned Dr Sophia Skyers of CIBS IQ Research to undertake a predictive Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) on all elements of the Regeneration Scheme. In April 2018 a report on the findings of Dr Skyers, together with recommendations, had been considered by the Council. The Council had authorised Ray, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder, to take any actions necessary to meet the recommendations within the report, subject to further internal consultation.

On 29 May 2018 Officers had met with Dr S. Skyers to discuss in detail the best way to take forward the recommendations in her action plan to mitigate against any potential negative equalities impact arising from the project. The action plan had been further considered by the Sheerwater Regeneration Officer Group earlier in the week, and a revised version, with comments from Sue Barham, had been circulated. The action plan was now considered page by page by the Members.

The first impact discussed was on small businesses, and it was noted that the engagement work would be led by the Council's Assets team. The role of Parkview Centre was discussed, and Ray advised that Officers would explore options for ensuring the Centre became a facility for the local community, meeting the needs of the residents, and moving away from simply being a venue for hire. The ambition was likely to reduce the number of users of the Centre coming from outside the Sheerwater area and thereby reduce the impact of traffic in the area.

Councillor Kemp noted that such an approach could have a detrimental impact on the income of the Centre, though Ray advised that any such loss would be offset by the benefits it would lead to within the community.

Attention was drawn to the future of the youth centre and Councillor Morales advised that cuts of up to 45% could be introduced by Surrey County Council across all children centres. Councillor Bittleston explained that the level of cuts was currently the focus of a consultation by the County Council and the level had not yet been determined. Ray added that the main activities at the youth centre were managed by Busy Bees rather than SureStart and that the Council would seek to engage with Busy Bees to explore options to minimise the impact of any funding cuts.

Engagement was discussed, with reference to points 3 and 4 within the EqIA and Ray advised that the Council would look to reinforce existing engagement and seek to identify creative ways of engaging those residents who, for various reasons such as time/access constraints or not being part of an organisation, were hard to reach.

Zafar referred to the wider community engagement taking place across Sheerwater and encouraged the Ward Councillors to participate in the events through the work of Sheerwater Together. The Council would continue to seek to differentiate between the community engagement work being undertaken in the area and the engagement with residents in respect of the Regeneration Scheme.

Attention was drawn to the reference in the EqIA of the work of the Oversight Panel and the suggestion that the Panel would look to engage with residents by holding an open session with the public. It was noted that the agendas and minutes from the meetings of the Panel were published and were emailed to a list of interested parties, and that information on the Panel was available on the Sheerwater Regeneration web pages.

The Chairman questioned where the perception of the Oversight Panel had arisen from and expressed concern that the Ward Councillors were not communicating the work of the Panel to residents. Attention was drawn to the attendance record of the three Ward Councillors, with the Chairman advising that the Ward Councillors, all of whom had been appointed to the Panel, had taken up less than 45% of the opportunities to attend the meetings. As an example, the Chairman noted that of the three Ward Councillors, only one, Councillor Aziz, were present.

Councillor Aziz considered that the Ward Councillors had been unfairly blamed for the poor communication of the Borough Council, and reminded the Members that he had previously sought to allow the residents of Sheerwater to attend the meetings of the Panel as observers. Councillor Aziz felt that the Ward Councillors had not been provided with sufficient information in order to answer the questions of residents. It was added that the Ward Councillors had held regular

surgeries to support the residents.

Ray expressed the fear that there was a perception amongst residents that the Council was withholding information; Ray emphasised that there remained areas of uncertainty on the scheme which would not be clarified until after the planning application had been determined.

The possibility of webcasting meetings of the Oversight Panel was discussed but was not generally supported, with Members reminded that, when a key meeting of Council had been webcast at Parkview, no residents had come to view the proceedings. It was proposed that, in view of the recommendation from Dr Skyers, the Council should take forward the suggestion of an 'Audience with...' approach and stage a meeting of the Oversight Panel within Sheerwater. Such an event would give the Council an opportunity to fully explain the ambitions for Sheerwater, including the additional health and wellbeing facilities and access to homes, to address any perception that the Council was withholding information. It was felt the event should be held once the planning application had been determined and the Council had a clear direction of travel. In particular, the Council would seek to encourage those residents whose voices were not normally heard, including elderly and disabled individuals.

There was some concern that the event could be dominated by those residents strongly opposed to the scheme. However, it was noted that over 100 families had willingly moved and that 40 home owners had sold their properties to the Council. Whilst a number of those opposing the scheme would be expected to attend, it was hoped that residents from across the area would be encouraged to participate, and that the event would provide a level of reassurance.

The Chairman noted that the Sheerwater Festival would be held on 11 August and suggested the possibility of the Council arranging a stand where visitors could seek information on the Regeneration Scheme. It was noted, however, that the Festival fell within the statutory consultation period by the Local Planning Authority and that the Council would be constrained in terms of the information that could be shared. However, Ray undertook to explore whether the Council would be able to host a stand that provided details of the leisure facilities, for which planning approval had been previously agreed, recognising that resources were limited.

Action: R Morgan

The Members of the Panel supported the proposal for an 'Audience with...' style event once the planning application had been determined. Ray advised that the planning application was scheduled to be determined in September 2018, though the timescale could slip in view of the volume of work involved in reviewing the application. Councillor Morales added that the venue for the event would have to be accessible to all, and that the event should be used to share good news and emphasis that the Panel was there to help. The suggestion to

webcast a meeting was not supported by the Members of the Panel.

Action: P Bryant

Councillor Morales noted that the minutes from the meeting of the Panel held on 29 March were not on the website. Officers undertook to rectify the omission, noted that the minutes, together with the agenda for the current meeting, had been circulated to those residents who had requested to be kept informed by email.

Action: P Capel-Williams

The comments by Dr Skyers in regard to the new leisure facilities were discussed and the Members of the Panel were advised that it was important that the programme of activities on offer was designed to meet the needs and aspirations of the community. It was therefore proposed that a series of community engagement activities should be undertaken with specific equality groups to understand local need to shape the programme (such as the times the swimming pool was available for lessons).

It was suggested that residents in neighbouring areas such as Byfleet, West Byfleet and Pyrford should be made aware of the new facilities. Ray advised that the initial step would be to ensure that the facilities, in particular the programme of activities, met the needs of the residents of Sheerwater. Once the consultation had been completed, the Council would look to promote the facilities beyond the boundaries of Sheerwater.

The employment opportunities arising from the work was discussed and it was noted there would be significant potential for local employment arising from both the construction stage and the new leisure facilities. The contractors involved would be encouraged to employ local residents in a similar approach to that adopted for the Asda superstore development.

Conversation moved onto organised drug crime in the area, and the problems faced by the community. The Police were aware of the growing concerns but did not always have enough evidence to support an arrest. Councillor Morales advised the Members of the improvements that had been achieved in Woking Park to prevent similar issues, including the introduction of measures to reduce shrubbery to below waist height and the installation of CCTV.

Councillor Aziz asked after the consultation with small businesses in the area, especially those along Devonshire Avenue. Ray informed him that the Asset Management Team would start to actively engage with local shops to determine their requirements as different solutions would be needed for each business. The Chairman noted that the Oasis Café had unexpectedly posted a "Business for Sale" sign in the window; Ray advised that he had received a request to meet with the owner but had been unaware of their intention to sell the business.

Peter undertook to take forward the implementation of the recommendations of the Equality Impact Assessment, taking into account the comments of the Oversight Panel. As each component was completed, updates would be provided to the Oversight Panel on the progress achieved.

4. Communications Update - Newsletter

Ray reported that the next edition of the Sheerwater newsletter was planned for mid-July and would include:

- Details of the new leisure facilities and the forthcoming engagement with residents on the programme of activities in the leisure centre.
- The commencement of works in relation to the leisure facilities.
- Reference to the highway works on Devonshire Avenue which had been authorised by Surrey County Council and would prepare the site access for development. It was added that the highway alterations were not affected by the planning application.
- Approximate timescales for works commencing summer 2018.
- Advance notice that vacant buildings would be protected by sitex and all vegetation in the gardens would be removed.
- The work of Sheerwater Together and the community garden.

In regard to sitexing the properties, Ray advised that a programme was being drawn up to protect any vacant properties. A sign would be posted on the door to each property advising that the properties had been acquired for regeneration and providing contact details to report any health and safety issues. Bollards would be used to prevent indiscriminate parking in the area. It was added that, whilst it was intended that the newsletter would give advance warning of the sitexing work, New Vision Homes had been instructed to immediately sitex any properties which were considered at risk.

The Chairman raised concern that despite the sitex, vacant properties would remain at risk of individuals seeking to strip out any lead and

copper, and that the sitex would be a clear indication that the properties were not occupied. Ray advised that the properties had to be protected from unauthorised occupation until such time as it was determined whether they were to be demolished or used for temporary tenancy depending on which construction phases the sites would be needed for. However, in view of the Chairman's comments, it was agreed that once it had been confirmed that a property was needed for an early phase, the property would be stripped of any copper and lead.

The Members of the Panel were advised that 'void' properties would remain liable for Council tax until demolished. The costs would be borne by the Housing Revenue Account (the HRA) and would be reported in the Council's 'Green Book'.

Options to accelerate the programme were being explored and the Council had now stopped letting any vacant properties in the Regeneration area until the phasing of the work had been finalised. Over 100 properties within the area had been used for temporary accommodation.

5. Independent Tenant Advisor (ITA)

The Community Charter provided for the appointment of an Independent Tenant Adviser (ITA), an individual who had extensive knowledge of tenancy issues and would work with the secure tenants. Peter was arranging to meet with two leading advisors and, whilst the Council had a clear idea of what roles were envisaged for the ITA, it was hoped to receive the benefit of their experience to finalise the arrangements. It was anticipated that the post would be taken up within the coming three weeks.

The advice provided by the ITA would be independent of the Council and would be given on a confidential basis. It was intended to set a limit on the amount of time the services of the ITA could be used by a resident without the prior agreement of the Council and the views of the ITA would be sought on what would constitute a reasonable number of hours.

6. Sheerwater Residents Association Consultation

The Chairman had received an email from the Residents Association expressing their concerns for the provision of playing facilities for Sheerwater Football Club during the Regeneration Project. Sue and Ray explained that the first team would be relocated to Woking Football Club grounds and that the reserve/youth teams would be relocated to new facilities at the Hoe Valley School for up to 2 years, vacating their current facilities in September 2018. The proposals had been discussed with Sheerwater Football Club and the Club had expressed its delight with facilities available. An update on the position would be included in the forthcoming newsletter, subject to formal confirmation

being received from Sheerwater Football Club.

Councillor Aziz asked whether the new facilities would have been completed within two years and whether there would be an option to extend the temporary arrangements for the Football Club beyond two years. Sue explained that the development of the new leisure facilities was due to start in July 2018 and was expected to be completed within 18months (end January 2020).

Councillor Aziz advised that a local resident had sought formal recognition by Woking Borough Council of the Sheerwater Residents Association. Peter informed Councillor Aziz that he had previously replied to the resident on the request, advising that the Council did not hold a list of Residents Associations and as such could not 'formally recognise' the Association, or indeed any other Residents Association. However, the Council had undertaken to communicate with the Sheerwater Residents Association in the same manner it communicated with any Residents Association.

In responding to the point raised by Councillor Aziz, Peter added that the website of the Association made clear that its purpose was to object to the regeneration of the area, and as such could not strictly be viewed as a Residents Association. Ray suggested that, if the Association needed any assistance in establishing a constitution, they were to be encouraged to contact Surrey Community Action. The Chairman noted that the Association had been encouraged in recent years to establish a neighbourhood forum. Councillor Morales added that other areas had been successful in establishing Facebook Groups to keep residents informed.

7. Future Work Programme

It was agreed an update on the adoption of the recommendations from the Independent Sheerwater Scrutiny Panel (the ISSP) would be submitted to the next meeting on 24 September 2018.

Councillor Morales raised the concern of what would happen to the temporary tenants within the regeneration area and whether they were aware that they would need to look for an alternative property. Concern was also expressed that Sheerwater residents were being prioritised for social housing above all others, causing long delays for housing in other areas of the Borough. Councillor Kemp advised that the top priority for housing remained those with social housing or health needs. Sue asked Councillor Morales to contact herself with the specific examples where those of highest need had been moved down the priority housing list.

8. Any Other Business

Community Events

The Chairman reported that there would be a Sheerwater Together Community Garden Planting Day held on 6 July 2018, to be attended by the Mayor in the morning. Members were encouraged to attend the event, which would be open to the whole community from 2pm. This programme was run in partnership with students from the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Wisley and the garden would be maintained by the Sheerwater Together Group and the local community, with a growing list of those willing to help. Within the garden there would be an array of plants and shrubs grown along with some edibles.

District Valuer

Councillor Aziz questioned the timescale of the responses from the District Valuer on the property valuations referred to them. Peter advised that 4 of the 12 referrals had now been assessed by the District Valuer. It was noted that there had been an initial delay due to

- i) Peter not referring cases to the District Valuer as quickly as he could have done and then
- ii) There was a conflict of interest as an employee of the District Valuer was a resident of Sheerwater. The matter had been resolved and the valuations were being completed.

Sheerwater Website

The Chairman expressed his thanks to Paola and her team for making the Sheerwater website easier to follow, noting that the site now featured at the top of any searches as a “best bet”.

9. Dates of Future Meetings

The following dates had been set for future meetings of the Oversight Panel:

- 7pm, Monday 24 September 2018
- 7pm, Wednesday 21 November 2018
- 7pm, Wednesday 30 January 2019
- 7pm, Wednesday 21 March 2019

10. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Oversight Panel held on 29 March 2018 were received.

11. Matters Arising from the Last Meeting

There were no matters arising from the last meeting.

12. To Discuss any Matters relating to the Sheerwater Regeneration Scheme Deemed Confidential

No items were raised.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 8.59 pm