

Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Thursday, 24 January 2008

Present: Councillor Greg Morgan (Chair) and Councillors Nora Ball, Magda Cullens, Mike Devaney, Mrs Doreen Dickinson, Anthony Gee, Catherine Hoyle, Keith Iddon, Margaret Iddon, Adrian Lowe, Marion Lowe and Rosie Russell

Also in attendance for Minute 08.ECS.5: Councillors Eric Bell, Alan Cain, Alan Cullens, Dennis Edgerley, Mrs Marie Gray, Pat Haughton, Laura Lennox, Peter Malpas, June Molyneaux, Rosie Russell and Iris Smith

08.ECS.01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Judith Boothman, Kevin Joyce, Roy Lees, Mick Muncaster and Shaun Smith.

08.ECS.02 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

No Members declared an interest in relation to matters under consideration at the meeting.

08.ECS.03 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 22 November 2007 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

08.ECS.04 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No members of the public requested to speak at the meeting.

08.ECS.05 SCRUTINY INQUIRY - CHORLEY TOWN CENTRE AUDIT AND DESIGN STRATEGY

Further to minute 07.ECS.35 (22 November 2007) the Panel Members along with other Members of the Council received a presentation from a representative of Landscape Projects commissioned to undertake a town centre audit. The company had experience of urban design assessments and design strategies for town centres and city districts, particularly in the North West of England, with work carried out in Blackburn, Accrington, Rochdale, Oldham and Burnley.

The audit involved information gathering, collation and analysis as well as consultation with stakeholders and the public.

The town centre audit was part of the town centre strategy which was a key project for the Council as it will help steer the future development of the town centre. The presentation explained the process and key objectives of the audit and presented some initial findings.

The audit will:

- Establish a clear picture of the quality of the town centre, about what is present, about its current condition and about what is valued;

- Provide evidence on which to base a design strategy and inform policy working and implementation; and
- Further the Council's contribution for Chorley to become of the most attractive and vibrant place in the North West, building on the character as a friendly, contemporary market town and its surrounding villages, whilst ensuring that Chorley plays a pivotal role in regional economies.

The presentation set out the strengths and weaknesses of Chorley Town Centre and the audit would identify the need to:

- strengthen the character and identity of the town centre;
- capitalise on the town's heritage;
- pursue gateway improvement;
- promote property maintenance and improvement;
- target underused and unattractive sites and buildings;
- take comprehensive action to improve the physical fabric, pedestrian experience and appearance of key areas;
- pursue schemes to improve safety and security;
- provide accessible car policy;
- enhance accessibility for all.

Members raised the following issues:

- The ring road was vital to Chorley. The alternative was the A6 running through the middle of the town.
- The proposed Phase 2 Market Walk development on the flat iron would push the town centre away from Market Street.
- The Flat Iron car park was vital to the town centre with the strength and future in its character.
- Restriction on short stay car parking payments and the need to link strategies.
- The ring road as well as the railway line cuts off the town centre with a poor subway link and pedestrian crossing.
- The recognition that Pall Mall was a main pedestrian route into town and the businesses would prosper along this route if improved and made attractive.
- Lack of a central point to the town centre.
- Improve the quality of the car parks at the Gillibrand area of the town centre.
- Car parks to be focussed upon to be a gateway into the town centre. Pall Mall area was poor for car parking.
- Build around the town centre heritage trail.
- The Placecheck event on the 12 February 2008 would provide useful information to be fed into the audit analysis.
- The Borough Council rather than the County Council should decide on highways issues such as tree planting in the Town Centre. Items forced upon the Borough Council by the County Council.
- A suggestion made that the market could be moved into Market Street such as Skipton and the occasional French Market that takes place in Market Street.

The Chair thanked Neil Swanson from Landscape Projects for a very informative presentation and welcomed the final audit report.

Councillors Anthony Gee, Adrian Lowe and Marion Lowe left the meeting at 7.50pm.

The Panel received a report of the Director of Corporate Governance enclosing a draft Inquiry Project Outline for the town centre scrutiny inquiry and the following were submitted.

The scrutiny inquiry on the Chorley town centre audit and design strategy will consider the following aspects:

Objectives

To scrutinise the audit of Chorley town centre and the production of a design strategy and to help ensure that the outcomes take account of the views of Councillors, stakeholders and the public.

Desired Outcome

That the scrutiny inquiry process contributes to the audit and design strategy for Chorley town centre at an early stage to maximise consultation and influence by Councillors, stakeholders and the public.

Terms of Reference

The scrutiny inquiry on the Chorley town centre audit and design strategy will consider the following aspects:

- The process of the audit, including understanding the key urban design objectives;
- The initial findings of the Company commissioned to undertake the work;
- The final findings of the Company and the outcome of their stakeholder and public consultation undertaken by the Company; and to
- Make recommendations on the value of the audit and the quality of the design strategy put forward.

Risks

- That the views of those consulted may not be able to be accommodated in any final design strategy, raising expectations beyond what can be achieved.
- That the Panel may find the technical aspects of urban design quite confused and difficult to apply in the audit process.

The report indicated that the Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel would be scrutinising the process and outcome of the audit and design strategy.

To progress the inquiry a site visit would be arranged to a comparative town centre where redevelopment works had taken place to gauge the impact and establish evidence of improvements in areas of footfall and the filling of vacant buildings.

RESOLVED – That the draft Project Outline for the Chorley Town Centre Audit and Design Strategy be approved.

08.ECS.06 BUDGET SCRUTINY FOR 2008/2009

The Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation) submitted a report setting out the spending and performance context for key spending areas at the Council, details of the rationale between the Executive draft budget proposals and the details of the key budget prospects for 2008/09.

The analysis of comparative data had shown that in the main the Council continued to drive down costs as measured by our relative performance against our nearest neighbours whilst continuing to improve both performance and in the main satisfaction with services.

The budget proposals aimed to achieve the key targets and increase in terms of the Council's Corporate Strategy with some of those requiring additional resources whilst others required working in a different way. New targets included climate change and older and younger people activities.

The Council continued to demonstrate good value for money resulting in maximum scores for both the use of its resources and value for money in the annual use of resources assessment.

The report set out an analysis of service costs against our nearest neighbours using the value for money profile tool for the following services within this Panel's remit, planning, waste management, street cleansing, Economic and Community Development, parking, community safety and sport and recreation.

Members of the Panel were requested to consider the Executive's draft budget proposals in the context of current spending and the Council's corporate priorities and make appropriate representations to the Executive for consideration during the finalising of the budget proposals.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation) reported that the Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 22 January 2008 had put forward several suggestions for the Executive Cabinet to consider and Members noted that a majority of them related to this Panel.

Members also considered the Capital Programme 2008/09 to 2010/11 and noted that the priorities were town centre investment, affordable housing, sustainability and climate change and investing in the Green Corridor. These priorities were based upon the key objectives contained in the Council's refreshed Corporate Strategy and upon a measure of our performance to date against that plan.

It was **AGREED** that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be recommended to submit the following suggestions to the Executive Cabinet as part of this year's budget consultation exercise.

1. To increase the number of Environmental Wardens.
2. To provide another vehicle for the Environmental Wardens.
3. That the hours of the Environmental Wardens be made flexible as currently they work to a restrictive core time pattern.
4. To improve the process of requesting the cleaning of footpaths, clearing of hedgerows and ditches outside the urban core and reporting of faulty street lights. Currently there can be confusion as to where the responsibility for this lies and how best to deal with Lancashire County Council when the responsibility lies with them.
5. To increase the use of the machine that removes chewing gum throughout the Borough.
6. To distribute to Members the schedule of work for street cleaning and grass cutting for their information and comment.
7. To identify areas where there is a lack of recreational facilities and either provide additional facilities or improve transport links to existing facilities nearby.
8. To explore concessionary arrangements with South Ribble where residents would be entitled to concessions within Chorley but South Ribble recreational facilities are closer.
9. That the proposed increase for grant of right of burial fees be phased.

08.ECS.07 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2007/08

The Panel received the current Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2007/08 Municipal Year and in particular the item relating to the Environmental and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

Chair