

Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

20th September 2017



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
P Barlow (Vice Chairman)	Yes	G Maclure	Apologies
Mrs M Cunningham	Yes	Mrs I Parker	Yes
Mrs D Garrod	Yes	R Ramage	Yes
J Goodman	Yes	B Rose	Yes
A Hensman	Yes	P Schwier	Yes
P Horner	Yes	C Siddall (Chairman)	Yes

11 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: There following interests were declared:

- Councillor Siddall declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 6 – ‘Fourth Evidence Gathering Session for the Scrutiny Review into Employment Sites and Premises’ as the owner of the Earls Colne Business Park, Malcom Hobbs was known to him and as a non-financial director of Ignite Business Enterprise.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, all Councillors remained in the meeting and took part in the debate and decision when the Item was considered.

12 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked, or statements made.

13 **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12th July 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14 **MEMBERSHIP OF TASK AND FINISH GROUPS FOR 2017-18**

INFORMATION: Members were advised that at its meeting on 12th July 2017, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that a Task and Finish Group in to Tourism in the Braintree District would be established and authority was delegated to the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in consultation with the Scrutiny Steering Board, to determine the membership of that Group.

Following consultation with the Scrutiny Steering Group, Councillor Siddall had exercised his delegated authority to agree the membership of the Task and Groups.

In accordance with the delegated authority, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had agreed the Terms of Reference for the Scrutiny Review by Task and Finish Group. The terms of reference for the Task and Finish Group were set out in the report.

Members were updated on the progress of the Task and Finish Group which had held its first meeting on 7th September 2017 where Councillor Mrs Pell was elected as the Chairman. At this meeting Members received their first evidence gathering session which included a presentation from Anita Thornberry, Executive Director, Haven Gateway Partnership.

DECISION: It was noted that the membership of the Task and Finish Group reviewing Tourism in the Braintree District comprises of the following Members:

Councillors: Mrs Jackie Pell, John Baugh, Mrs Mary Cunningham, Andrew Hensman, Patrick Horner, Mrs Iona Parker, Peter Schweir, Mrs Sue Wilson,

REASON FOR DECISION: To acknowledge the Membership of the Task and Finish Groups for 2017/18 and to note its progress.

15 **FOURTH EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION FOR THE SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO EMPLOYMENT SITES AND PREMISES**

INFORMATION: On 5th September 2017 Members representing the Committee took part in a tour of the District where they travelled to a number of employment/industrial sites to gather evidence of the different types of sites available and the purposes they served.

Those Members who took part in the site visits reported back to the rest of the Committee and made the following points:

- It was recognised that there was an obvious difference between the different sites that were visited.
- Members were impressed with the site at Skyline and felt the layout and facilities there contributed to a good working environment.
- It was noted that throughout the sites there was a lack of large employers with the majority of businesses being small/medium employers (SME's).
- The proposed development of residential sites throughout the District will need to be supported with employment sites in order to sustain employment opportunities and a thriving working economy in accordance with the growing population.
- Members were particularly impressed with the site at Earls Colne and recognised that this had been developed to suit the local needs and demands. The site was a family run site and this was evident in the maintenance and upkeep as well as the facilities available to employees/occupants of the units.
- It was reported that there were a number of businesses on the Earls Colne site who were struggling to recruit employees, it was thought that this was due to the location and remoteness of the site; however, public transport and travel options were available.
- The site at Earls Colne was at capacity, with no empty units or opportunities for grown on space. There was a diverse use across the site, including a hotel, available for wedding receptions, golf course, Essex Air Ambulance base and a gym.
- It was recognised that the site at Earls Colne was well managed and had not incurred an increase in rent in 27 years and it was suggested by Members that this approach may be used as a model for other employment sites.

- In some of the older site there was a major issue with congestion. It was recognised that many of the roads were not wide enough and roundabouts and turnings were not big enough for Heavy Goods Vehicles to maneuver.
- Skyline was designed well in terms of layout and accessibility for employee/ customer parking and large vehicles.
- The site at Eastlink 120 was currently unoccupied with no units having been sold, the primary infrastructure was yet to be developed which may explain why businesses were not willing to consider this site in its current condition.
- It was reported that there were some tentative plans for the development of the carpark near the railway station at the Freeborns site in Witham.
- The sites at Halstead would be well placed for startup businesses; however there was no room for anything bigger, with no room for expansion.
- The biggest issue for many of these sites was infrastructure.
- It was noted that in terms of employments sites and business parks the importance of planning and location should not be underestimated and in order to progress employment in the District going forward aspects such as location, design, landscaping and car parking should be considered.
- One of the main differences between the older and newer sites, apart from the location was the lack of facilities for turning circles, parking facilities and cars in general. The older sites were extremely cramped and not in line with the expectations of modern employers/Businesses.
- There was a real feel of difference between the old and new sites in terms of security.
- Planning would play an essential role in how the Eastlink 120 site would be developed, taking in to consideration infrastructure, security, car parking and the variety of businesses. It was recognised that standard sized units would only attract standard sized businesses and going forward it was important to develop different sized units in different locations for different functions.
- It was recognised that there was a desire to create business parks that included not only businesses but also commercial retail and sport and wellbeing, such as that developed at the Earls Colne site. It was important for employees working at these sites to be able to have access to a small retail outlet in order for them to eat and relax at lunchtime; this would also enable the opportunity to entertain other businesses at the site.
- The demands of industry and technology were growing and this needed to be taken in to consideration and accounted for when looking at planning and infrastructure for the future.
- It was reported that the roads at the Bluebridge site in Halstead were not adopted by Essex County Council and were privately owned which was evident by the poor conditions and lack maintenance in comparison to other sites.
- It was believed that the location of business parks in respect of whether they were urban or rural was not significant; the important factors that would have an impact were accessibility, technology, facilities and sustainability.
- It was recognised that there was a need for additional office space; however developers would not invest in building office space until they had a tenants readily available.
- It was very obvious which sites had been developed by a single landlord.
- The Witham industrial sites were developed in the 1960's to accommodate the overspill from London.
- It was reported that Mr Hobbs, owner of Earls Colne Business Park, was very impressed with the support he had received from the District Council, and felt that this had been a key element in the growth of his industrial estate.

Members put forward the following suggestions for potential recommendations and lines of enquiry going forward in the Scrutiny Review:

- The site at Earls Colne had grown organically and it was recognised that the restrictions put in place by planning policies can often prevent this from happening, it was suggested that this should be discussed with officers going forwards with a view of reviewing some of the restrictions put in place for employment sites.
- The network of cycle ways, particularly in rural areas, should be looked at with a view of creating safe routes for people to travel to employment sites. This would enable people to cycle to work and reduce the number of cars on the roads.
- It was suggested that the possibility of a joint partnership with developers be looked at with a view of generating additional income for the District Council.
- Witham Industrial Watch were a useful tool for engaging with a number of businesses across the industrial estates and it was suggested by Members that an invitation to attend a future meeting of the Committee be extended to representatives from the Witham Industrial Watch.
- Invest Essex were a group established by Essex County Council who looked at the investment for the whole of Essex and had good knowledge of what was commercially available. They also regularly engaged with a number of organisations and attended events inside and outside the County. It was suggested by members to look at potentially inviting representatives of Invest Essex to attend a future meeting of the Committee.
- Milbank Concrete Products Ltd had been established locally and had remained in the District. The Council had engaged with Milbank on a number of occasions and it was suggested to invite representatives from Milbank to a future meeting of the Committee to establish how the Council had supported them in the past.
- It was reported that the Cabinet Member for Economic Development had recently published a consultation document on a new draft plan for economic development in the District and Members were advised that they may wish to consider this document under the terms of reference for the Scrutiny Review.

It was agreed by Members to develop an electronic survey to be circulated to businesses in the District to discover the local needs and development plans going forward. Members felt this was an opportunity to engage with local businesses and gain an insight in to the difficulties faced by growing businesses. The Committee agreed to delegated authority to Councillor Rose to collect potential questions from Members and collate these prior to submission the Governance Team.

16 **DECISION PLANNER**

DECISION: That the Decision Planner for the period 1st October 2017 to 31st January 2018 be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.30pm.

Councillor C Siddall
(Chairman)