



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Guildhall, Northampton on Monday 31 January 2022 at 6.00 pm.

Present Councillor Dermot Bambridge (Chair)

Councillor Rufia Ashraf
Councillor Anthony S. Bagot-Webb
Councillor William Barter
Councillor Louisa Fowler
Councillor Enam Haque
Councillor Charles Morton
Councillor Kevin Parker

Also Present: Councillor Lizzy Bowen
Councillor Phil Larratt, Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Jo Gilford
Councillor Julie Davenport
Councillor Terrie Eales

Officers Simon Bowers, Assistant Director - Assets and Environment
Kevin Langley, Interim Head of Major Projects and Regeneration
Stuart Timmiss, Executive Director - Place and Economy
Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager
Maisie McInnes, Democratic Services Officer

39. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Haque declared a personal interest on Item 5 the Northampton Town Plan, as a Northampton Town Councillor.

40. Minutes

The Chair deferred the approval of the minutes and declared the minutes from both meetings in January would be considered for approval by the Place and Overview Scrutiny Committee at the next meeting on 29 March 2022.

41. Chairman's Announcements

There were none.

42. Northampton Town Plan (planning and growth including other main town progress and review

The Chair introduced the Northampton Town Plan agenda item and invited Marie Dickie to address the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Marie thanked the Chair and the Committee and said she welcomed the development of the area. She explained that the Friends of Northampton Castle had worked hard to promote a heritage hub for Northampton and urged the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee to investigate the conservation area and help to develop a space that would celebrate Northampton heritage.

At the Chair's invitation, Councillor Stone addressed the committee and expressed her concern regarding the criminal activity that took place in central Northampton and the increasing poverty of areas surrounding the town centre. She explained she was thrilled that investment was taking place and was pleased that the Marefair site was being invested in but felt that the Council needed to address anti-social behaviour issues as part of the regeneration projects taking place and prioritise the safety of residents.

Members asked Councillor Stone to share her opinion and explain what she felt the Council could do to listen to residents and what the community needed in terms of development. Councillor Stone explained that the Council needed to work closely with the police to ensure community safety and for there to be more visibility on the streets of Northampton. She explained that Castle house was a working-class area with a diverse population, and social housing and supported living developments were needed to benefit the community.

The next speaker Councillor Alwahabi addressed the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee and stated that he welcomed the regeneration led by West Northamptonshire Council, but felt the Council needed to take more steps to ensure the town centre was a clean, green, and safe place to attract visitors. He continued that St Giles had some fantastic architecture and had won awards for investment, and at present there were 8 empty units. He urged the Council to develop the town with integrity and emphasised that social value should be at the heart of planning consideration, and planning should think carefully before disposing of town centre assets.

Councillor Birch thanked the Chair and introduced herself as the Chair of Northampton Town Council and a former councillor of the Northampton Borough Council and explained she had been involved with the town plan from the beginning. She praised the extensive plan which incorporated 10 different project areas. Councillor Birch expressed concern about how cohesion would be achieved through the developments fitting together, and how the Council would manage the construction side of the projects with contractors building in the town centre. She also expressed concern regarding the empty units in the town centre being changed into residential units and alluded to the former Marks and Spencers and Debenhams department stores. She expressed concern that the size of the individual rooms in the flats were far too small and had no outside space for residents. She felt it was the responsibility of the University of Northampton to ensure student accommodation was available on campus and it was best placed in the town centre. Councillor Birch concluded that more greenery and outside spaces were needed in the town centre and this should be incorporated into the plan. The Chair thanked the four speakers for their valuable contributions and invited the Executive Director Place and Economy

to respond to the speakers. The Executive Director Place and Economy thanked the speakers and shared that in terms of planning, a number of the issues discussed were outside the remit of the Council. However, West Northamptonshire Council were looking at a new housing strategy and were working in partnership with the University of Northampton as there was a demand for student accommodation. The new planning policy would look at how people were placed and take a contextualised approach to bring together regeneration and people. The Place directorate would be announcing a new innovative planning initiative shortly and there were lots of activities and projects launching that would bind the issues raised by the speakers. He continued that the Council were working in partnership with the Police and Public Health colleagues to ensure the safety of residents. The regeneration of Northampton town centre would make the town an attractive place for residents and bring visitors into the town, with the Derngate and St Giles street and other areas attracting tourism.

The Chair thanked the Executive Director Place and Economy and invited the Head of Major Projects and Regeneration to deliver his presentation on the Northampton Town Plan.

The Executive Director Place and Economy informed the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the Council had recruited a Director for Cultural Impact. He shared that the architecture and materials being used were comprised from the same colour palette. As well as the physical work taking place, the regeneration would bring together the arts and cultural aspects of Northampton. There were also ongoing discussions with central government and hotel operators about investment in the town. There was also the opportunity for local businesses to use future office spaces, and businesses and government branches from London to commute to Northampton for work.

Members praised the Northampton Town Plan and asked what considerations had been made regarding the development of parking, transport, and highways. The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth responded that a new Car Parking Strategy would be in place by 31 March 2022. The transport plan was interlinked with the regeneration plan and it was being considered. There was a Northampton Forward Board that acted as a decision-making body for the regeneration of the town, and the board consisted of a cross-section of businesses, representatives from the University of Northampton, and members of the community. Within the group there were various working sub-groups that looked at various issues, for example there was a political subgroup which included the Northampton Town Council, a heritage subgroup, and a new communications and marketing board had been proposed to the Northampton Forward Board to share the news about developments. The Cabinet Member expressed that consultation and widespread involvement was critical as well as the need for transparency and governance. She explained there was also an oversight and delivery subgroup, and the business plan and financial reports were delivered to the subgroup which gave feedback to the Northampton Forward Board. The Cabinet Member concluded that an economic prospectus regarding the Town Plan would be available soon which would provide more detail on how the centre plan ties everything together.

Members expressed concern regarding county lines and other criminal activity in the town centre as this needed to be addressed as part of the redevelopment. Members praised the Vulcan centre and the residential accommodation but questioned where the green spaces would be and play areas for children.

The Head of Major Projects and Regeneration responded that the pandemic had proven that people were spending more time at home. The development would encompass green spaces, roof terraces and breakout spaces, such as the Market Square which would become a place that could accommodate everyone. The fountain in the square would be used as a feature and for splash play for children. There would be more greenery and seating in the town centre too. Members asked if an adventure playground would be installed, and the Head of Major Projects and Regeneration stated that the development would look at using public art acting as incidental play as there was not enough space in the square to incorporate a formalised play space, but other areas will be explored as the project moves forward.

The Chair asked if the redevelopment would be linked to Becketts park and if there were plans for bridges or underpasses for pedestrians to cross the busy road. The Head of Major Projects and Regeneration agreed and responded that the crossing had been identified as needing improvement.

Members questioned the benefit to cost ratio and the Head of Major Projects and Regeneration explained that the general principles were that cost could be attributed directly to different areas with the benefit being the uplift of the land would show that the development would mean the land was more valuable than what was there before. The government wants this to be applied with the Northampton Town Plan as well as increasing visitor numbers which would lead to increased spend rates and jobs per square metre. He also referred to the Green Book and Business Case Guidance that was updated in September 2021, as the Council needed to demonstrate a strategic business case.

Members asked about the new economic model as the high street in Northampton was changing as there was a demise of big department stores and asked how visitors coming into Northampton was being encouraged. The Head of Major Projects and Regeneration shared that Northampton had a vast cultural experience and leisure offer which visitors would find attractive, and he had been liaising with different stakeholders and these brands would look to invest in the town centre if the market square was regenerated. Northampton had a bustling evening economy with restaurants and bars, as well as the Derngate theatre to offer too. The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth expanded that Northampton would have a more cosmopolitan feel, championing small independent businesses and culture.

Members commended the impressive Northampton Town Plan and asked if there were plans to develop historical houses in the centre such as All Saints Church to celebrate the cultural element of the town and generating income from visitors. The Head of major Projects and Regeneration agreed that there was more to be done in the town centre, but the development of the market square was only the beginning of the regeneration that would take place in Northampton. The Executive Director Place and Economy confirmed that the directorate was currently undertaking a review of

assets and were aware of opportunities in Northampton's assets and buildings. The Town centre plan was the catalyst for change in Northampton and would be the start of future funding and investment in the town.

Members urged officers to involve community groups in the development as community engagement and support for the voluntary sector was needed and the Cabinet Member Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth welcomed the involvement of community groups and suggested that she invite members to the community subgroup of the Northampton Forward board.

Members shared that they welcomed empty units being changed and brought back into use but felt that issues such as parking and fly tipping needed to be investigated. The Head of Major Projects and Regeneration commented that they hoped to attract non-car users in the town as there were plenty of transport links from the town centre with the bus and rail station nearby, and not all the housing schemes would be able to offer a parking space per accommodation.

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation and members for their contributions. He invited the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider when they would like to receive the next update. Members discussed and agreed that a report providing a progress update in 6 months' time would be added to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee work plan.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That members heard the presentation on the Northampton Town Plan delivered by the Head of Major Projects and Regeneration
- (2) An update on the progress of the Northampton Town Plan would be brought to the Committee in July 2022.

43. Flood Risk Management

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste introduced Councillor Chauhan as Assistant Cabinet Member and commended her work with the team on Flood Risk Management. The Chair then invited the Assistant Director Assets and Environment Senior Flood and Water Officer to deliver their presentation on Flood Risk Management.

The Assistant Director Assets and Environment delivered the presentation on Flood Risk Management and highlighted the salient points:

- There was a series of ongoing future projects and capital works to improve flood resilience in West Northamptonshire communities.
- The current service delivery model relied on outsourcing to external providers and the Council would be bringing the resource in-house so to enable all contracted work to be delivered. This would increase efficiency by having a specialist team to understand West Northamptonshire specific flood issues.
- Climate change was causing more pluvial flooding and the flood resilience project would look at prevention methods to reduce risk

- The Council were looking to collaborate with the University of Northampton to work with students to complete work experience and gain knowledge in the area during a sandwich year in their degree

Members were pleased to hear that flood risk management was being improved and asked if more site visits could take place as there were often issues reported to members that were difficult to explain over the phone without someone coming to review the incident. Members also asked for better accessibility on the Council's website reporting flooding issues and asked for details of a designated contact. The Assistant Cabinet Member responded that there had been a changeover of staff in the department at Ruth Burnham was the person to contact as the Senior Flood and Water Officer.

Members questioned if flood prevention was in relation to flooding by natural causes. The Assistant Director Assets and Flooding confirmed that the Council were concerned with preparing for natural floods and explained that flood plains were a natural part of how rivers behave, and part of the wider problems is that many houses have been built on a flood plain. The Assistant Cabinet Member for HR shared that there were Regional Planning Committee Flood Boards which had a primary function to look at locations that required additional funding and requested that any examples could be brought to the board to be considered for funding.

Members discussed problematic areas in West Northamptonshire for flooding and mentioned Brackley, St James, Silverstone, Tiffield and Towcester as key flood areas that would need investigating and prevention resources. The Senior Flood and Water Officer shared that the Innovative Flood Resilience Project was tasked with flood matters and improving community resilience considering that climate change meant that more places would be at risk of flooding in the future, and the Council needed to be prepared and have prevention measures in place. She explained that the board had been working with DEFRA and had acquired £6m in funding over the last year to ensure flood resilience for properties built on flood plains.

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation on Flood Risk Management and for answering questions of the committee. The Chair requested that a progress update report be brought to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 12 months' time on Flood Risk Management.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Committee heard the Assistant Director Assets and Environment deliver a presentation on Flood Risk Management
- 2) That the Committee requested a progress update report be brought to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2023.

44. **Review of Committee Work Plan 2021/2022**

The Chair introduced the Committee Work Plan and explained that as the work plan would be updated to incorporate the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee's request to have an update Northampton town plan in 6 months' time and an update

on Flood Risk Management as agreed at the meeting and would remove St James' Bus Lane from the Committee Work Plan.

Members suggested that the Committee Work Plan be formatted so that comments could be aligned next to each item and be reviewed regularly to document the committee's progress. Members felt that a RAG rating could be applied to demonstrate any items which needed urgently addressing in red, as an example. Members also suggested the Committee Work Plan be formatted in chronological order with closed items at the bottom and ongoing issues at the top of the list, and requested that the work plan incorporate the Place Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish groups

The Chair thanked members for their great ideas and asked the Deputy Democratic Services Manager to revise the Committee Work Plan and circulate to members for feedback and any further comments. The Chair then invited the Deputy Democratic Services Manager to discuss the annual report of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Deputy Democratic Services Manager referred to the Committee Work Plan and asked if members were happy for the annual report to come to the next meeting or if they would prefer it be delayed until June 2022 as the Committee only started the work programme from June 2021. Members agreed that the annual report be produced in time for the meeting in June.

The Chair thanked members for attending the meeting and announced the next meeting of the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee would take place on 22 February 2022 and the Committee and the topics for the meeting would be an introduction to Active Travel and fly tipping and closed the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Deputy Democratic Services Manager revise the Place Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan to make agreed format changes and to add an update on the Northampton Town Plan for July 2022, an update on Flood Risk Management for January 2023 and to remove St James' Bus Lane from the work plan.

45. **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____