

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE REGENERATION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON TUESDAY, 30TH NOVEMBER, 2021

MEMBERS: Councillors Mahmut Aksanoglu, Chinelo Anyanwu, Margaret Greer, Charith Gunawardena, Tim Leaver, Andy Milne and Edward Smith

Officers:

Programme Director - Meridian Water, Head of Planning and Strategic Design Manager

Also Attending:

8. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair, Councillor Margaret Greer welcomed all attendees to the meeting and invited councillors and officers to introduce themselves.

9. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

10. INTRODUCTION - PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

The chair stated there were two items to discuss which have been distributed to all members. We will discuss the correspondence sent by members during the meeting.

11. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

Page 8; the document is due to be shared with committee regarding Business with grants.

12. MERIDIAN WATER MASTER PLAN

Peter George (Programme Director – Meridian Water) and Lisa Woo (Head of Placemaking – Meridian Water) presented on following items:

- The Meridian Water masterplan is a corporate document. The plan is to take an updated masterplan to Cabinet.
- Masterplan version 1 is what has been worked to over the last few years, it supported the financial plan and contributed to the win of

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£170m of government grant funding. Over the last few months, we have worked on version 2.

- Phase 1 involves us being on site now building 300 homes, phase 2 includes a planning application for 2300 homes. The housing infrastructure fund is due to start on site next year has a detailed planning application.
- Within the masterplan redline, there is a retail park purchased by an international developer providing over 500 jobs
- The masterplan address Ikea and Tesco who are expected to redevelop their land, assuming homes will be built.
- All the masterplans must respond to the strategic priorities set by the Council. If cabinet approves the plan, feedback will be sought from local community and business to inform the plan.
- The Meridian Water financial model was approved in October 2019, since this several events affected this including covid 19, the councils declaration of a climate emergency and construction costs rising. The masterplan is undergoing financial review which will be brought to Cabinet in summer 2022.
- The masterplan involves connecting businesses, social settings, and the surround environments.
- Meridian water has 2 key parks on the masterplan. Open space and public ground are important for people's wellbeing. These will be for all residents of the borough to use, not just Meridian Water.
- With increased emphasis on the importance of drastically reducing operations carbon we need to encourage residents to take up cycling and use public transport.
- The plan offers three primary schools and one secondary school, they take up a large amount of space.

Questions and comments:

- Officers noted that we have negotiations with Tesco and Ikea, but we rely on our powers as a planning authority and in addition to the local plan we are working on a supplementary planning document. This will enable the council to provide parameters around height.
- The Meridian Water strategic risk register are available to all members.
- Originally wanted vibrant streets with 2000sqm of retail space. Covid has affected the way people work and shop. Members noted they was conscious for having empty shops. Officers confirmed the council will be the landlord on ground floor buildings for non-residential purposes. They offer a higher-than-average ceiling height and have been designed to be flexible for different uses such as retail, workspace, or community spaces. A balance is needed so that Meridian Water compliments surround town centres and does not undermine them.
- Officers commented that residents have been keen to have affordable groceries within walking distance and Tesco's offers this. This allows smaller business to offer other things. There is a challenge with Tesco and Ikea having conflicting opinions on car parking space.

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- It was noted by members that it is key to have local people having local jobs. Officers explained that they want to improve opportunities for people in the area. A construction skills academy plan has been approved and local people will be the priority. Spaces will be offered to council tenants, unemployed and long term unemployed. It will offer to train up to 500 people per year, with space to modify the curriculum to align with the sectors in Meridian water. There are also 3 film studios in Meridian water, another 3 will be built over the next year which will provide a skills academy for up to 450 people per year.
- A good start has been made on the employment strategy, £57m of contracts have been let at Meridian one, £11m of which have gone to local companies. We had a target to have 25% of local labour on Meridian one, we have exceeded this and currently have 40%.
- Officers clarified the current draft maintains 6000 jobs and 10,000 homes but the process is evolving so this could change.
- Members commented parks and open spaces are essential, but we should look at having lots of smaller spaces rather than large spaces that take up a lot of room. It was also suggested that primary and secondary schools could run on the same site.

The chair summarised with;

- Thanking everyone for their input
- The panel need to think about what they want to be brought back to the scrutiny panel so we can delve into more detail.
- It was noted that Charith's had emailed questions that officers will review
- The canal and river trust would be a good starter point to get some ideas on waterside living and how we can support and sustain this.
- It would be useful to receive a revised workplan for Meridian Water

13. PLANNING IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Vincent Lacovara (Head of Planning) presented this item and highlighted the following:

- Engaging with this panel virtually in March 2021 provided useful feedback which fed directly into the production of a service plan for the planning service.
- The planning service covers development management and strategic planning design. The structure has changed since March, there is an additional fixed term joint development manager who we have a successful candidate for. In the meantime, we have an interim working in the post. A planning commercial manager, fixed term 2-year contract is out to advert.
- Progress since March has included an up to date service plan with the input of members and officers which is now in place, we will produce another for next year.

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- The department has run whole service virtual events and supported team culture and moral to avoid isolation and make sure the team is working together well. There has been a gradual return to the Civic.
- There has been a commercial plan developed in collaboration with the commercial team. A new fixed term commercial manager role was created. This will help to optimise the income we generate and be efficient so we can invest back into the service.
- An internal audit was held on CIL and section 106, we are now progressing on the actions which arose from this.
- There has been a sustained improvement on performance for planning applications. Technology was upgraded a few weeks ago. Also had an audit of the enforcement function and we are progressing on these actions.
- Plan drawing service has been set up and is ready for the launch.
- The new challenges we face include the housing delivery test results and the implications of appeals and big public enquiries. The Environment Act could require new skills and resources within the service that we don't currently have. We are expecting to find out soon about the government's rethink of the planning system.
- Coming soon the service has ongoing technology improvements, a refined approach to the CIL and section 106 and new roles advertised across the service.

Questions and Comments:

- Officers explained the planning fees do not cover the cost of full service, there is capacity to increase service to charge fees. The new government changes add costs and not a lot of income.
- The uniform upgrade has been comprehensive, and the service is working closely with digital services. Also looking at a London wide Uniform user group to share knowledge.
- Staff are coming into the office for meetings, committees, team building exercises and do site visits.
- The service are continuing to work on responses, which is linked to workload. It has been encouraged to send holding responses. IT upgrades will help with this.
- The new role will help customer service by being focused on income generated services and setting the culture for being customer focused.
- There will be additional capacity within enforcement with the new roles and 2 apprenticeship posts to come.
- The last year after lockdown there was a drop of planning applications, it then picked up to a level which made up for the loss. This year is stable with no significant increase.
- It has been raised to members by residents that they are concerned about the direction of the planning service, they don't feel it's serving their purpose or interests. The planning service has had to plan for unprecedented levels of growth and housing targets have increased significantly. The core strategies are from 2010 which are out of date which causes issues. The planning service is trying to address getting a new local plan adopted.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted the date of the next meeting:

Wednesday 2nd February 2022

The meeting ended at Time Not Specified.

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