

**Minutes of the Sustainable Development Select Committee  
Tuesday, 3 March 2015 at 7.00pm**

Present: Councillors Liam Curran (Chair), James-J Walsh (Vice-Chair), Bill Brown, Suzannah Clarke, Amanda De Ryk, Mark Ingleby, Stella Jeffrey, Helen Klier and Paul Upex.

Apologies: Councillor Obajimi Adefiranye.

Also present: Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director, Customer Services), Nigel Tyrell (Head of Environment), John Miller (Head of Planning), Simon Moss (Policy and Development Manager, Transport) Mark Humphreys (Group Finance Manager, Customer Services), Sam Kirk (Strategic Waste & Environment Manager), Sarah Fletcher (Sustainability & Climate Change Policy Lead), Giles Brady (Director, CEPEC Career Management Ltd.) and Roger Raymond (Scrutiny Manager).

**1. Minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2015**

1.1 RESOLVED: That:

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2014 be signed as an accurate record of the meeting after the following addition:

4.7 (d) Local Assemblies should take the lead in coordinating action in these areas.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

**3. High Streets Review - Evidence session**

3.1 John Miller (Head of Planning) introduced the report to the Committee. The key points to note were:

- The Council's planning policies are contained in the Council's local plan. The local plan is currently made up of a number of documents, which include the Core Strategy (2011), the Development Management Local Plan (2014) and the Lewisham Town Centre Local Plan (2014).
- The local plan policies aim to sustain the viability and vitality of town centres. Retail, commercial, and community uses within the Borough's high streets are protected through the adopted policies. The strongest level of protection is given to retail uses within the Borough's primary shopping frontages.
- Planning policies can shape the success of town centres. Existing planning policies protect retail, commercial and community uses in town centres, promote residential uses where appropriate, and promote the night time economy where appropriate. However, there are limitations to the influence that planning can have due to the way in which planning regulations have been written. For example:

- The Planning Service is unable to control the occupants of premises where there is no change of use. Therefore a change from one type of retailer within the A1 use class to another type of retailer within the A1 use class cannot be controlled. For example, the Planning Service could not control the change of a unit from a supermarket to a discount retailer. Nor could the Council control the change of a unit from a bank to a betting shop.
- The Planning Service is unable to make a planning decision based on prejudices against a particular end user. For example, an application for a convenience shop operated by a major supermarket chain could not be refused on the basis that an independent operator would be preferred by the local community.
- In relation to current high street trends and observations a number of points were made:
  - In relation to vacancy rates, the majority of centres within the Borough are faring well compared with the national and regional statistics. The national mean vacancy rate is currently estimated to be 11.8%, with the London vacancy rate estimated at 7.8%. The mean vacancy rate for the Borough's two major town centres and the seven district centres compares favourably, being 7.3% in 2014.
  - Each town and district centre, with the exception of New Cross/New Cross Gate, is allocated a primary shopping frontage. The primary shopping frontage is considered to be the retail core of the centre, and therefore A1 (retail) uses are given especially strong protection within this frontage. The Local Plan sets a target of 70% of units within the primary shopping frontage in each centre to be in A1 use. Many of the centres either meet or come close to the target. However the figures for some centres are significantly below the target. These figures demonstrate that retail may not be the dominant focus of some centres, and that these centres may have other strengths and niches.
- Lewisham has fared well in respect of the changing nature of retail in respect of high streets, in the sense that Lewisham's district and major town centres have not suffered from failing high streets or high vacancy rates, and therefore the national discussions relating to these issues are not directly applicable to the Borough.
- The Committee heard about the various roles of different high streets, such as Lewisham town centre, Bell Green, and Grove Park and some of the issues they are facing. For example the plans for Lewisham Town Centre that include:
  - Significant expansion of retail floorspace.
  - Improved leisure and evening economy provision.
  - Provision of 3,300 new homes.
  - Improvement and expansion of streetscape, pedestrian linkages, open space and recreational facilities.

3.2 In response to questions from the Committee, the following was noted:

- Officers would circulate LB Bromley's vacancy rate to Members so the Committee could have a comparison to Lewisham's vacancy rate.
- The European Union (EU) Grants Officer would be informed of the possibility that grants could be obtained from the EU for public realm improvements.

Usually, the Grants Officer would help co-ordinate bids across a number of boroughs for various projects.

- The Planning Service is limited in what it can do to stop buildings changing their use to restaurants, cafes and takeaways in areas such as Blackheath and New Cross. It is also limited in its powers to control the level of 'budget' shops in areas such as Catford. The Council does have landlord powers, but Catford Mews/Shopping Centre is the only major retail area it owns. In the original agreement to purchase the Catford Shopping Centre, it was established that the developer would attempt to balance the accounts, while the regeneration of Catford was on hold, and so the businesses that operate in the Centre are those that have the potential to make the Centre money.
- Resources are limited in the Planning Service and Business Development teams, so work is focused on the larger shopping centres rather than the smaller areas. Also, the financial situation within local government at the present time, and future projections, makes it difficult to commit to projects. However, the service will assist in implementing the Neighbourhood Plans where possible. Officers are also willing to liaise to Members and local communities about what limited training they could offer in relation to supporting the Neighbourhood Plans.
- The Council is engaged in a programme of streetscape improvements across the borough which will help improve the look of many high streets. A Council can issue a '215 notice' in certain circumstances where it is considered that the condition of a building or land is detrimental to the amenity of an area or neighbourhood.
- Changes to the shopping environment in Lewisham are influenced by issues such as the popularity of 'free for 30 minutes' parking bays like those in Sydenham. The increase in use of 'shop and grab' places has more of an impact in areas with big retailers.
- The Council does keep a register of commercial property ownership in the borough.
- The present owners of Lewisham Shopping Centre are Land Securities, who manage a number of retail centres across the UK. In a recent survey, only 9% of people in the catchment area of Lewisham Shopping Centre stated that it was their first choice for shopping. However Land Securities have attempted to make the Shopping Centre more attractive for shoppers, with promotions such as the Street Feast last summer. With the Lewisham Gateway Development, there will be more opportunities in the future to showcase the Shopping Centre and build its potential.
- Officers will continue to work with the market traders to make the markets more attractive and viable. The importance of Lewisham Market is recognised by the Council, and its attractiveness to residents due to their access to cheap, affordable produce. The problem with managing the storage and waste around the market is recognised, and how best to manage this going forward needs to be considered. Officers have tried a number of initiatives to grow Catford Market and the surrounding area, such as the improved streetscape, however its attractiveness should increase once the Catford Regeneration Scheme is complete.
- The rent-levels in Catford might be affected by the Catford Regeneration Scheme once it begins, and officers will monitor the situation.

- There should be opportunities in the future to encourage a diverse mix of buildings across the borough, for example a hotel will soon be opening near Lewisham Town Centre.
- Officers are confident that the retail space that is available in Thurston Road will soon be let. Once the Renaissance development and the Lewisham Gateway are complete, more benefits will be gained by business and retail in central Lewisham. In the longer-term, the proposed Bakerloo Line extension would also help to grow the local area. The Council will also play its part in developing the area.
- Officers understand that the Council are in negotiations with Tesco to develop the car park area, and there will be an office-to-residential scheme at the former Citibank building.

3.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- a) Note the evidence presented.
- b) Consider the evidence as part of the Modern Roads Review.

#### **4. Home Energy Conservation Report**

4.1 Sarah Fletcher (Sustainability & Climate Change Policy Lead) introduced the report to the Committee. The key points to note were:

- The Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) requires the publication of a publically-available report on the council's plans to achieve improved energy efficiency, and for the council to report on progress in implementing the proposed measures every two years.
- In December 2013 Lewisham Council established an OJEU compliant Energy Efficiency Installations Framework with a delivery partner. The Framework is set up to cover a wide range of energy efficiency measures in domestic and non-domestic properties and covers the London Boroughs of Lewisham, Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich and Southwark – enabling Councils and any Registered Providers with housing stock in those boroughs to access the Framework.
- The Council is working with Bexley and Bromley Councils through the Department of Energy & Climate Change (DECC) Green Deal Communities Fund to deliver the Green Deal Communities Fund project, which is taking an area based approach to increasing the energy efficiency of existing housing alongside a focus on improving energy efficiency standards in the privately rented sector.
- A number of projects were outlined, for example, the work carried out via engagement with the health sector through the Warm Homes, Healthy People scheme. It has been successful in supporting 937 residents in the last 3 years and has helped reduce pressure on other parts of the public sector as a result.

4.2 In response to questions from the Committee, the following was noted:

- Lewisham's sustainable energy projects and initiatives are to help enable the Government to achieve its carbon emissions target of a reduction of 35% by 2020. With regard to new build, Lewisham's Core Strategy is in conformity

with the London Plan, and follows their carbon reductions target. However, changes to the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) have meant there is less funding available to progress domestic energy efficiency retrofits.

- Officers will populate the Home Conservation Report with the current projects that they, with partners, are undertaking to meet the requirements under the Act.
- Feedback from customers shows that even though the “knock-on-the-door” method is not always a popular way to engage with customers in relation to home conservation schemes. However, feedback has also found that it is also one of most effective methods to get the message out to customers. Lewisham uses this method of engagement alongside a range of other methods to engage with customers, such as events, use of multi-media communication routes, letters to residents, articles in council and local press. Where a ‘no cold-calling’ notice is displayed on a property this is always abided by and the information provided and processes are agreed with Trading Standards in advance.
- Officers recognise there have been some problems in how developers have installed, commissioned and managed communal heating systems in some buildings in the borough. However the review by the Sustainable Development Select Committee has also identified ways in developers have been able to address or ‘design out’ the problems – both through going back to improve existing systems and by using this information when subsequently commissioning other systems.
- The £39 charge for the initial Green Deal Assessment is less than what other boroughs are charging for the same scheme and was introduced to try and reduce barriers to entry for residents. The external solid wall work could cost approximately £6,000-£7,000, so the fee would be a small cost to assess whether the external solid wall work is necessary. The process has been adjusted and residents now get a free technical survey with a quote and then only proceed to the Green Deal Assessment if they want to continue with the works.
- Local authorities are finding it extremely difficult to access funding for energy efficient schemes and fuel poverty from the Government. This is because the Government has changed the scheme which means that the majority of funding has now been deployed.
- The Council is willing to work with private sector landlords and private sector landlord organisations to improve the efficiency of their properties because that housing tenure is the least thermally efficient. This will help to deliver reductions in borough-wide carbon emissions as well as supporting residents who may otherwise be in fuel poverty.
- Developers have to consider the Mayor of London’s energy priorities when designing and constructing new builds. The Government introduced the ‘Feed-In Tariff’ system (from an energy supplier) in 2010, which changed the system for incentives to install an electricity-generating technology from a renewable or low-carbon source away from government grants and into a commercially viable proposition.
- The Council would encourage community groups to access independent sources of funding, for example ‘Kickstarter’ to help raise funding for energy efficient improvements to community buildings.

- Through the Warm Homes, Healthy People scheme, packs are handed out to keep people warm, including gloves, hot-water bottles etc, and officers would be interested in looking at any other schemes that will help further.

4.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee note the report.

## 5. Waste Strategy

5.1 Sam Kirk (Strategic Waste & Environment Manager) introduced the report to the Committee. The key points to note were:

- At the Committee meeting in October 2014, four options were proposed:
  - Option 1 (Baseline plus garden waste): Refuse collected weekly, recycling collected co-mingled weekly and garden waste fortnightly;
  - Option 2: Refuse collected fortnightly, recycling collected twin stream (i.e. paper separately from the rest of the recycling) fortnightly and garden & food waste collected weekly;
  - Option 3: Refuse collected weekly, recycling collected twin-stream fortnightly and garden waste fortnightly;
  - Option 4: Refuse collected fortnightly, recycling collected twin stream fortnightly, garden waste collected fortnightly and food waste collected weekly.
- Since the Waste Strategy last came to the Committee, a 5th option has been proposed. This fifth option is the same as Option 4 except that instead of recycling collected twin stream (i.e. paper taken out), recycling remains as a co-mingled service:
  - Option 5: Refuse collected fortnightly, recycling collected co-mingled fortnightly, garden waste collected fortnightly and food waste collected weekly.
- There may well be other changes to the Strategy going forward, in relation to how these options affect kerbside properties, properties within blocks, and houses being divided into houses of multiple occupation.
- Officers are currently conducting a number of tests to ensure that the various options are compliant with the Waste Regulations.
- Officers are also talking to other local authorities to identify any lessons learnt in relation to the various options.
- The Committee also heard about the economic practicability of the options; for example:
  - the price of oil affecting both transport costs of shipping materials around the world and upon the commodity price of the material (e.g. plastic) against using virgin material.
  - despite contracts being in place, some local authorities are seeing paper mills turn away paper that is not of a high enough quality or has got wet after being stored in boxes for a week due to wet weather.

5.2 In response to questions from the Committee, the following was noted:

- The purpose of the consultation is to engage with residents on the various approaches to managing waste in Lewisham. As well as asking for people's opinions, the consultation will also provide an opportunity to educate and

inform the public. The precise elements of the consultation have yet to be agreed, but should involve public events and focus groups as well as the use of the online surveys and going directly to residents to garner their views.

- The proposed charge for the annual subscription based garden waste service is £60 a year, and this would generate an income of approx. £787,000 if a 25% take up from garden properties was achieved. Lewisham currently has about 4,000 unique users for its current request for garden waste service and by introducing a subscription based service it is hoped a more efficient and reliable service will be provided to householders.
- Officers will investigate whether there are any local authorities that offer an opt-out on residents' Council Tax bill if they do not have a garden, and thus have no garden waste to collect.
- Street-level properties are the first property types to be looked at, and estate properties and other blocks, will be looked at in later phases, should the proposals be adopted. In the meantime more research needs to be done to ascertain number and type of properties, number of containers each property may require and the frequency of collection from these properties. Officers are looking at what comparable local authorities have done to achieve the same aims.
- The investment in SELCHP for Lewisham has led to minimal landfill rates and the waste has been generated into electricity, as well as supplying some homes in LB Southwark with heat and power. Progress needs to be made on recycling rates but the investment in SELCHP and the benefits to Lewisham should not be underestimated.
- The Council has been talking to social entrepreneurs such as the London Re-use Network about innovate ways to recycle and reuse other waste in the borough.
- In terms of collecting food waste for compost (for garden use), it would depend on the type of waste that Lewisham collects and the contract terms to see if this would be feasible.  
Officers would clarify to Members whether all schools receive free recycling.

5.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee note the report.

## **6. Modern Roads Review - Final report and recommendations**

6.1 The Chair reported that the report would be deferred to allow more time to invite additional witnesses that could provide a more 'visionary' view of modern roads, one that could provide a vision of what a modern road should look like in the future, in a multi-user environment.

## **7. Select Committee Work Programme**

7.1 Roger Raymond (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report to the Committee. The key points to note were:

- The Committee has now concluded its work programme for 2014-15.
- Some items that the Committee have indicated it wants to consider in 2015-16 are:

- Flood Risk Management strategy: consultation results
- Lewisham Central Opportunity site
- Heritage and Tourism
- Borough-wide 20mph zone implementation
- Bakerloo Line extension proposals: update
- Neighbourhood Planning
- Catford Regeneration Programme

7.2 In response to questions the Committee were advised:

- Suggestions for the Committee's work programme for 2015-16 should be sent via the Scrutiny Manager or Chair, and would be presented in a work programme report for the first meeting of 2015-16.
- The Scrutiny Manager would also liaise with officers in relation to items for the 2015-16 work programme.
- The provisional date for the next meeting is Thursday 16 April 2015.

## **8. Items to be referred to Mayor and Cabinet**

8.1 None.

The meeting ended at 10.00pm

Chair:

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Date:

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