

## GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 13 DECEMBER 2018

#### I N D E X

<b>Page No</b>	<b>Minute No</b>	<b>Heading</b>
1	423	Apologies for Absence
1	424	Declarations of Interest
1	425	Minutes of Last Meeting
1	426	Scrutiny Review – Business Centres and Industrial Units
5	427	List of Key Decisions – Issue No 80
6	428	Work Programme
6	429	Additional Urgent Items
6	430	Date of Next Meeting



The presentation had helped to set the scene for the Committee's review by informing Members about how the service had changed in recent years and the challenges which it faced going forward.

The Committee now moved to the next stage of the review. Following site visits carried out earlier in the day, Members interviewed staff and business tenants from the Coney Green Business Centre in Clay Cross. They were each asked to address a series of questions.

**Council and Business Staff:-**

Estates Technician and Concierge (interviewed together)

Q1 What is your role in supporting this service?

The officers explained their roles as General Estates Technician and as Concierge at the Coney Green Business Centre. The Estates Technician explained that she was part of the Council's Estates Management and Facilities Commercial Property and Commercial Services Team, which managed the Authority's commercial property portfolio. The Concierge told the Committee that he was employed by an external company, which had been contracted by the Council to provide reception services at the Centre. He had a range of duties, which brought him into regular contact with its business tenants.

Q2 How do you think the service is working?

Both of the officers felt that the service which the Council offered to its business tenants worked well and was appreciated by them. Members were informed that there was a high take up of the units at the Centre and that the site was regarded as well managed and maintained to very high standards. They emphasised that the business tenants value the support which they receive from the Centre's management. They also value the additional facilities, such as the bookable conference rooms at the Centre, that they can use.

Q3 Have you any suggestions for improvements?

The officers made no specific suggestions at this point.

Q4 Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

The Estates Technician highlighted capacity problems, especially around property surveying and valuation. The Committee asked that the Council's Senior Valuer be invited to discuss these capacity problems and their implications on the service with Members as part of the review.

Members discussed the points raised by the officers. In particular, they explored how requests for repairs and other services were reported, how the budget for repairs was allocated and what impact the Council's more strategic approach to

asset management might have on how its Business Centres and industrial units were maintained and kept fit for purpose. Members also discussed some examples locally of other well managed business centres and considered how these compare to those offered by NEDDC.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Committee thanked the officers for attending the meeting and their contribution to the review.

The officers then left the meeting.

**Business Centre Tenants:-**

The Committee then heard from three of the Centre's Business Tenants. They were each asked to address a series of questions.

**Business Centre Tenant – A (Wiltshire Farm Foods)**

Q1 What attracted you to leasing a unit in this business centre?

The Business Tenant explained that his company had chosen to locate at Coney Green for a variety of reasons. These include the low rents, the excellent location close to the motorway network and the good security on the site.

Q2 How well does it meet your current and future needs?

The Business Tenant made clear that although the site met the Company's current needs, more space would be required as the business expanded. The Tenant was happy with the support and services provided at the Business Centre, and especially the role played by its management, who were highly accessible and keen to resolve any problems or issues. He also valued and made use of the conference facilities provided at the Centre.

Q3 Have you used the on-line tenant issue reporting system and if so did it work well?

The Business Tenant contacted the Centre Management directly to sort out any problems.

Q4 Have you any suggestions for improvement?

The Business Tenant reiterated that he was satisfied with the site. He highlighted some possible ways in which the site could be improved, such as better drainage to help avoid flash flooding. Members also discussed with the him tenant parking at the site and whether this was adequate.

The Committee thanked the Business Tenant for his contribution to the review and he then left the meeting.

Business Tenant – B (Pillbox Design)

Q1 What attracted you to leasing a unit in this business centre?

The Business Tenant explained the commercial and other reasons why he had chosen to relocate his business to the area from its previous location in Leicestershire. He made clear that one of the key reasons why he had chosen to relocate was because the move to Coney Green had allowed his business to grow.

Q2 How well does it meet your current and future needs?

The Tenant made clear that the centre met his current operational requirements and that he now occupied two units. He was happy to stay at the Centre if it continued to meet his need for space in the future.

Q3 Have you used the on-line tenant issue reporting system and if so did it work well?

The Business Tenant contacted the Centre Management directly to resolve any issues or problems. He told Members that they were very accessible and keen to help.

Q4 Have you any suggestions for improvement?

The Business Tenant emphasised just how important it was to provide the range of facilities which businesses require – from workshops through to storage facilities. He highlighted just how valuable storage could be to companies. The Committee felt it important that this must be reflected in the review recommendations – possibly as an interim resolution around the inclusion of such facilities at all new build business centre sites in the future. Members also discussed with him the parking and other facilities at the site.

The Committee thanked the Tenant for his contribution to the review and he then left the meeting.

Business Tenant – C (STAL)

Q1 What attracted you to leasing a unit in this business centre?

The Business Tenant explained how he'd been attracted by the modern facilities which the Centre could offer and how these helped to provide the right high quality image for his business, which had become increasingly focussed on the aerospace industry.

Q2 How well does it meet your current and future needs?

The Business Tenant made clear that the centre met his current needs. However, he expected the business to grow significantly and so would require a lot more accommodation in the future.

Q3 Have you used the on-line tenant issue reporting system and if so did it work well?

The Business Tenant contacted the Centre Management directly to resolve any issues or problems. He told Members that they were always willing to help.

Q4 Have you any suggestions for improvement?

The Business Tenant felt that the Council should continue to build a range of facilities to attract and enable companies to grow into larger businesses.

The Committee thanked the Business Tenant for his contribution to the review and he then left the meeting.

Members discussed the points raised by the Business Tenants. As part of this, the Committee both noted and welcomed the high level of satisfaction at the Centre and especially the role which Management played in helping to ensure the smooth running of the Centre for its Business Tenants. In this context, it was clarified that Tenants were expected to go directly to the Centre Management in order to report faults etc rather than to use an on-line reporting system.

The Committee also reviewed as a whole the evidence which it had received during the day. In particular, Members highlighted what they saw as the key strategic question about the role of the Council's Business Centres and Industrial Premises which had emerged from the evidence. Should the Centres seek to provide support to start-up business who can then move into accommodation provided by others as and when they need more space or should the Council seek to offer a more 'vertical' or integrated approach to business development, in order to help companies to grow in the future? The Committee felt that this ought to be addressed as part of the review.

**427 List of Key Decisions – Issue No 80**

The Committee considered Issue No 80 of the List of Key Decisions which set out the major decisions being taken over the next few months.

The Committee confirmed that there were no key decisions it wished to look at, at this time.

RESOLVED – that the list of Key Decisions Issue No 80 be noted.

**428 Work Programme**

The Committee noted its work programme for 2018/19 and the amendments that would be made as a result of today's meeting to consider capacity issues and property surveying and valuation.

**429 Additional Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items to be discussed.

**430 Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Growth Scrutiny Committee is scheduled to take place on 28 February 2019 at 1.00 pm.

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