

GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 24 NOVEMBER 2015

I N D E X

Page No	Minute No	Heading
1	408	Apologies for Absence
1	409	Declarations of Interest
1	410	Minutes of Last Meeting
2	411	Scrutiny Review Interviews – Vacant Land
15	412	Additional Urgent Items
15	413	Date of Next Meeting

GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 24 NOVEMBER 2015

Present:

	Councillor J Windle	(Chair)	
	Councillor W Lilleyman	(Vice-Chair)	
Councillor	S Boyle	Councillor	B Rice
"	C Cupit	"	R Smith
"	A Powell	"	K Tait

Also Present

Bryan Mason – Executive Director – Operations (Min No 411)
Helen Fairfax – Planning Policy Manager (Min No 411)
Niall Clarke – Director of Regeneration Development – Rykneld Homes (Min No 411)
June Haslam – Housing Strategy Officer (Min No 411)
John Knight – Senior Estate and Valuation Officer (Min No 411)
Sue Broadhead – Overview and Scrutiny Manager
Sarah Cottam – Governance Officer

408 Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor C Tite.

409 Declarations of Interest

Members were requested to declare the existence and nature of any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or other interests, not already on their register of interests, in any item on the agenda and withdraw from the meeting at the appropriate time.

There were no interests declared at this meeting.

410 Minutes of Last Meeting

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of the Growth Scrutiny Committee held on 22 September 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

411 Scrutiny Review – Vacant Land – Interviews

The Committee carried out several interviews as part of its review into vacant land.

Bryan Mason – Executive Director – Operations

- (1) What long term objectives do we have for effective asset management within the Authority?

The Committee were advised that the Council had the Acquisition and Disposal Policy in place and also the new Corporate Plan had recently been put in place. The Council treated each acquisition and disposal on its own merits but would seek to use assets for a longer term interest.

The Council buildings were seen as assets. The Council's main offices at Mill Lane were an asset, Coney Green which were industrial premises, provided a good turnover of profit of approximately £100,000 per year. The Council would occasionally sell off premises to bring in a profit. The Council were currently disposing of the Ridgeway Craft Centre and Holmewood Depot through demolition and would look at options to build on the land for economic purposes. The Council received money from right to buy sales of Council houses and the money was re-invested into social housing. The Council received 70% of all right to buy sales. The Council would also sell off prime land such as ransom strips from which a more significant profit could be made.

- (2) How do land assets support our wider corporate objectives and strategies including for Urban extension?

The Committee were advised that before selling off any land, it would go through an officer/member debate in order for the best option to be discussed for that land. There would always be local member and Cabinet involvement.

- (3) How do we measure progress and performance against the asset management plan?

The Council were in the process of agreeing the current plan and objectives were set out through the corporate plan. The Committee were advised that management planning needed to be flexible and reactive to the current market. The Council could possibly look into selling off footpaths for example at Clay Cross for ALDi. The Council would also look at asset rationalisation and bring back reports to members on the progress of sites such as Saltergate.

- (4) Is there an integrated departmental and corporate approach to the management of land assets.

Yes there was. There was the Asset Management Group in place and this included representatives from several departments and was open to Scrutiny.

This Group ensured a complete corporate approach to the management of land assets.

- (5) What other information systems do we have to help informed decision making and planning?

The Council held a list of assets which was supported by a geographical system. The finalised Asset Management Plan would be with Members in a few months time. The current list of assets was 5-6 pages long for the District. Committee were advised that there was an 80-90% occupancy rate in business premises in the District. It was stated that the roller shutter premises were in big demand and the leisure centres within the district were largely used by the public. It was found more cost effective to refurbish premises such as leisure centres and not dispose of these. The Executive Director – Operations advised that the car parks within the District were very well used but there was no charge for the use of the car parks following a member decision. The Council could make a small profit from renting out areas of land for agricultural and grazing purposes.

- (6) What progress has been made on the production of an up to date Asset Management database?

The Committee were advised that information on the progress that had been made on the production of an up to date asset management database would be available next month.

- (7) How do we determine whether land we own is for disposal, development or retention?

The Committee were advised that each case for disposal, development or retention would be looked at on its own merits, it was found that anyone was interested in any land within the District, the Council would always consider an offer.

- (8) How are our decisions on use of land linked to our corporate plan?

All the Council's ambitions were set out in the corporate plan and these would be set out in all reports put to Committee or Cabinet.

- (9) Do we involve local members or Parish Councils in identifying land that could be used by the Council say for housing?

Parish Councils would approach the District Council with proposals, but each request would be taken on its own merits. The Executive Director – Operations advised the Council would be more than happy to discuss any issues with local members in the District.

- (10) What are the main barriers in the Authority to the identifying available land and/or disposal of land?

The Executive Director – Operations advised that there were no barriers as such in identifying available land or land for disposal. The Council retained a list of all its assets and this was very understandable. The Committee were advised that the District Council was more agile compared to the County Council as they had many more stakeholders in their land than the District had.

- (11) How well is the Disposals and Acquisitions policy working?

The Committee were advised that the Disposals and Acquisitions Policy had only been in place for one year but was working well. The Policy was the first port of call when determining what would be done with an asset within the District. An Asset Management Group had been established and this had brought in a wider representation over the Council.

- (12) If we dispose, develop or retain land how is this linked to the Disposal and Acquisition Policy?

The Executive Director – Operations advised that the Council needed to adhere to the Disposal and Acquisitions Policy. The Council were always aware of the transparency agenda that decisions could be challenged on why things had been done in a certain way. The Committee were advised that the Monitoring Officer at the Council would always check over all policies made.

- (13) What costs are involved in keeping land we own, do any generate income?

The Committee were advised that two sites Holmewood Depot and Ridgeway Craft Centre were incurring costs for the Council currently. However, these were in the process of disposal. The Executive Director – Operations advised the Committee that the Mill Lane offices would work out cheaper in the long run than the Saltergate offices.

- (14) What is the net cost of our garages after rental and other costs have been deducted?

The net cost of garages after rental was unknown, but expenditure would be lost on maintaining garages, many of which were not fit for purpose and were seen as a target for anti-social behaviour.

- (15) How do we avoid the mass sell-off of land assets to private developers and are there alternative ways to generate income?

The Committee were advised that the Council did not own a huge amount of land assets, but anything that was to be sold would go through the member process and the Council would always get the market value for that land. When selling off land the Council would always want to know what the

developer's plans were for that land. The Committee were advised that the Council needed to generate £250,000 each year, so would rather find alternative uses for land, doing this would keep the pressure off the Council's finances for the next five years.

- (16) How can new social housing be locked into a new local plan in light of the planning legislation changes?

The Council would always take into account the need for social housing in the District and this needed to be viable. The Committee were advised that changes within the HRA would make it difficult for the Council to build new homes in the future.

- (17) How can we benefit from the example of other Council's provision of affordable housing and the information systems they use for asset management?

The Committee were advised that as a Council it was fairly open and transparent. Ideas were picked up from other Authorities, including through the Strategic Alliance with Bolsover District Council. Officers within the Council would also keep up to speed on what other Council's were doing.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the Executive Director - Operations for contributing to the review.

Helen Fairfax – Planning Policy Manager

- (1) What long term objectives do we have for effective asset management within the Authority?

The Planning Policy Manager was not aware of the long term objectives for effective asset management within the Authority.

- (2) How do land assets support our wider corporate objectives and strategies including for Urban extension?

The Planning Policy manager understood that the wider corporate objectives and strategies were fundamental to the Council. The Council needed to maximise on its assets and land in key areas could contribute significantly to this.

- (3) How do we measure progress and performance against the asset management plan?

Not applicable.

- (4) Is there an integrated departmental and corporate approach to the management of land assets.

The Planning Policy Manager was aware of the Asset Management Group but had no seat on this Group. It was felt there were occasions where there had been opportunities missed and the occasional attendance of a Planning representative would make the Asset Management Group more aware of the Local Plan.

- (5) What other information systems do we have to help informed decision making and planning?

The Planning Policy Manager was not aware.

- (6) What progress has been made on the production of an up to date Asset Management database?

The Planning Policy Manager had no details of progress that had been made on production of an up to date Asset Management database.

- (7) How do we determine whether land we own is for disposal, development or retention?

The Committee were advised that the Estates Team would ask the Planning Department their view on developments and to provide advice where necessary.

- (8) How are our decisions on use of land linked to our corporate plan?

The Planning Policy Manager advised the Committee that she had no involvement on the use of land linked to the Corporate Plan.

- (9) Do we involve local members or Parish Councils in identifying land that could be used by the Council say for housing?

The Committee were advised that local members or parish councils would be involved in identifying land and this would be done through a consultation exercise if part of the Local Plan.

- (10) What are the main barriers in the Authority to the identifying available land and/or disposal of land?

Many people may think the Local Plan could be a barrier to identifying available land or for disposing of land. The Committee were advised that decisions were taken on land on its own merits.

- (11) How well is the Disposals and Acquisitions policy working?

Not applicable.

- (12) If we dispose, develop or retain land how is this linked to the Disposal and Acquisition Policy?
Not applicable.

- (13) What costs are involved in keeping land we own, do any generate income?

Not applicable.

- (14) What is the net cost of our garages after rental and other costs have been deducted?

Not applicable.

- (15) How do we avoid the mass sell-off of land assets to private developers and are there alternative ways to generate income?

The Committee were advised that it was up to the Council to decide what land assets would be sold onto private developers. The Planning Department would only provide an end of use value of land if required.

- (16) How can new social housing be locked into a new local plan in light of the planning legislation changes?

The Committee were advised that the Right to Buy Legislation and Housing Bill had changed, but wasn't sure how it would come through in legislation. The Planning Policy Manager advised the Committee that the Draft Local Plan would be in place by 2017.

- (17) How can we benefit from the example of other Council's provision of affordable housing and the information systems they use for asset management?

The Committee were advised that there was no example through Planning.

The Planning Policy Manager raised issues regarding the Asset Management Group, and felt that this could work better. It was advised that there could be clearer relationships between economic development, estates and Planning. An example of where issues had occurred at a piece of land at Tupton was raised. No feedback from estates was given to Planning on why the land at Tupton could not be brought forward. The Committee were advised that Asset Management did not put any available land on the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) Register.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the Planning Policy Manager for her contributing to the review.

Niall Clarke – Director of Regeneration and Development Rykneld Homes

- (1) What long term objectives do we have for effective asset management within the Authority?

The Committee were advised that Housing Provision was Rykneld's priority. The key issue was to deal with the non traditional housing stock and Rykneld were constantly looking at how to make the best use of the Council's stock. The Director of Regeneration and Development advised the Committee that he sat on the Asset Management Group.

- (2) How do land assets support our wider corporate objectives and strategies including for Urban extension?

The Director of Regeneration and Development advised the Committee that the land assets supported the wider corporate objectives and strategies and created jobs within the District. Rykneld Homes would look at opportunities to feed into the Council's Corporate Plan, giving the ability to increase the Council's housing stock.

- (3) How do we measure progress and performance against the asset management plan?

The Asset Management Group had only met two to three times including recently. The Group would look at the options being considered for land. The Asset Management Plan had not yet been agreed and had just recently been recirculated for comments. The Group were advised that the economic development team, Rykneld Homes and Councillors Kerry and Austen attended the Asset Management Group.

- (4) Is there an integrated departmental and corporate approach to the management of land assets.

Yes, this had not been as good in the past but now had a stable representation on the Group. There were always conflicting demands for land and pressure on capital receipts, but the Asset Management Group was seen as a good place to resolve issues.

- (5) What other information systems do we have to help informed decision making and planning?

Rykneld Homes had an Asset Management Plan on the Council's stock. The GIS system was used for land ownership and ordnance surveys were also used. The Director of Regeneration and Development felt that the GIS system was up to date as Rykneld Homes regularly used this system.

- (6) What progress has been made on the production of an up to date Asset Management database?

The Director of Regeneration and Development was unaware of what progress had been made on the production of an up to date Asset Management database.

- (7) How do we determine whether land we own is for disposal, development or retention?

The Committee was advised that a policy had been adopted recently and was very useful. The Asset Management Group was used to discuss all issues regarding land and to discuss all options and priorities for best use of that land. The Council received a lot of enquiries regarding land and it was felt that local members' advice would always be useful.

- (8) How are our decisions on use of land linked to our corporate plan?

It was felt that the decisions linked in well with the Council's Corporate Plan and supported growth and the local communities.

- (9) Do we involve local members or Parish Councils in identifying land that could be used by the Council say for housing?

Yes, the Director of Regeneration and Development was aware that Local Members were involved, it was not as clear that the parish councils were always involved. Rykneld Homes had a good relationship with the parish councils but didn't know how much information was filtered through. It was felt that parishes had that good local knowledge.

- (10) What are the main barriers in the Authority to the identifying available land and/or disposal of land?

There were no barriers in disposing of land. When identifying available land it was unknown what estates looked for, but Rykneld would always talk to estates and legal when identifying available land.

- (11) How well is the Disposals and Acquisitions policy working?

The Director of Regeneration and Development felt that the Disposals and Acquisitions Policy was working fine as it set out all the requirements clearly.

- (12) If we dispose, develop or retain land how is this linked to the Disposal and Acquisition Policy?

All land would be put through the Asset Management Group to determine the best option for that land.

- (13) What costs are involved in keeping land we own, do any generate income?

The costs involved in keeping land we own would include maintenance required to keep the land in order. It wasn't sure how estates would deal with vacant land. The Director of Regeneration and Development advised that land could be used on a temporary basis to bring in rental.

- (14) What is the net cost of our garages after rental and other costs have been deducted?

The Committee was advised that Rykneld Homes were dealing with garage repairs on an ad-hoc basis. The rental for garages was very low at approximately £6 per week. The Committee was advised that the costs for garages was spiralling and the removal costs of asbestos roofs was quite high. The issue of some garages had been taken through the Asset Management Group for demolition. Rykneld Homes had recently cleared a site in Killamarsh and it was felt that garage sites were no longer viable as there were ongoing issues with parking.

- (15) How do we avoid the mass sell-off of land assets to private developers and are there alternative ways to generate income?

The Committee were advised that the Asset Management Strategy would prevent the mass sell off of land and any land to be discussed would go through the Asset Management Group.

- (16) How can new social housing be locked into a new local plan in light of the planning legislation changes?

The Director of Regeneration and Development advised that he was not part of the Local Plan process but Rykneld Homes was very supportive of the Local Plan. The Director of Regeneration and Development was aware of the new legislation changes to the Planning policies.

- (17) How can we benefit from the example of other Council's provision of affordable housing and the information systems they use for asset management?

The Committee were advised that it was felt other Councils could look at how North East Derbyshire and Rykneld Homes made provisions for affordable housing. The Council also learnt from past projects. However he also stated that Rykneld Homes kept up to date with the work of other Councils.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the Director of Regeneration and Development, Rykneld Homes for contributing to the review.

June Haslam – Housing Strategy Officer

- (1) What long term objectives do we have for effective asset management within the Authority?

The Committee were advised that the Council were always looking to the future and would want to find good value and effective use of any assets.

- (2) How do land assets support our wider corporate objectives and strategies including for Urban extension?

The Council provided a wide range of housing and would make use of their own assets where necessary.

- (3) How do we measure progress and performance against the asset management plan?

Not applicable.

- (4) Is there an integrated departmental and corporate approach to the management of land assets.

The Housing Strategy Officer was aware of the Asset Management Group but Housing Strategy did not have a place on the Group. She felt that they should have an input into the Group but acknowledged Alison Westray-Chapman, the Assistant Director for the service had a seat on this Group.

- (5) What other information systems do we have to help informed decision making and planning?

Housing Strategy carried out their own site audit and logged all the Council's land. The information was gathered through estates and Rykneld Homes but there had been a lot of changes with personnel and structures recently and so wasn't sure if the Asset Management Group had picked up on this.

- (6) What progress has been made on the production of an up to date Asset Management database?

The Housing Strategy Officer was only aware of the housing site audit carried out.

- (7) How do we determine whether land we own is for disposal, development or retention?

This was determined through the Asset Management Group but she was not sure if this was systematic or on an ad-hoc basis.

- (8) How are our decisions on use of land linked to our corporate plan?

The Committee were advised that the decisions needed to link with the Council's aims.

- (9) Do we involve local members or Parish Councils in identifying land that could be used by the Council say for housing?

Yes, the Council had involved local members and parish councils in the past and had recently been involved through consultations on the regeneration framework. Housing Strategy had met with parish councils in the past and felt it was very worthwhile as local knowledge was invaluable.

- (10) What are the main barriers in the Authority to the identifying available land and/or disposal of land?

The Housing Strategy Officer was not sure that there were any barriers and the Council should know what land it owned.

- (11) How well is the Disposals and Acquisitions policy working?

The Housing Strategy Officer was not familiar with the Disposals and Acquisitions Policy.

- (12) If we dispose, develop or retain land how is this linked to the Disposal and Acquisition Policy?

Not applicable.

- (13) What costs are involved in keeping land we own, do any generate income?

The costs involved in keeping the land we own was the maintenance of that land. The Housing Strategy Officer advised that some land was let for grazing and some may not be in use. It was advised that no good sites were found from the recent audit carried out.

- (14) What is the net cost of our garages after rental and other costs have been deducted?

Not applicable.

- (15) How do we avoid the mass sell-off of land assets to private developers and are there alternative ways to generate income?

The mass sell off of land was avoided by taking the decisions through Councillors and the Asset Management Group should come up with options for each land asset.

- (16) How can new social housing be locked into a new local plan in light of the planning legislation changes?

The Committee were advised that the Government were proposing starter homes, this would be in place of affordable housing. The definitions of what

constituted starter homes or affordable homes could cause some difficulty in the future.

- (17) How can we benefit from the example of other Council's provision of affordable housing and the information systems they use for asset management?

The Housing Strategy Officer thought that there was a lot of knowledge within the Council. There was the site audit carried out through housing strategy and the Committee were advised that housing strategy should have an input into the Asset Management Group.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the Housing Strategy Officer for contributing to the review.

John Knight – Senior Estate and Valuation Officer

- (1) What long term objectives do we have for effective asset management within the Authority?

The Committee were advised that the Council had not always been good on asset management. This was done on an ad-hoc basis and was driven by capital receipts. The Council were currently in the process of introducing the Strategy to improve this.

- (2) How do land assets support our wider corporate objectives and strategies including for Urban extension?

The Committee were advised that the objectives were not compatible and conflicted. There was growth, affordable housing, versus capital receipts which was to maintain a level amount of income. The Committee was advised that land was identified through Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and this supported growth.

- (3) How do we measure progress and performance against the asset management plan?

The Asset Management Plan was currently in progress and this would state the priorities more clearly.

- (4) Is there an integrated departmental and corporate approach to the management of land assets.

The Council had an integrated approach and were advised what the priorities were for each land asset.

- (5) What other information systems do we have to help informed decision making and planning?

The Committee were advised that the Council needed a comprehensive list of the Council's assets. There was a register listing what the Council owned, but some sites needed further investigation so more detail on their use and any associated issues were included.

- (6) What progress has been made on the production of an up to date Asset Management database?

The Committee were advised that making the Asset Register more comprehensive would be very time consuming, but the extra detail was required. Each asset on the register should state the reasons for retaining, what was important in terms of growth and have the need for a member steer.

- (7) How do we determine whether land we own is for disposal, development or retention?

This would depend on the initiative and this used to be mainly for capital receipts.

- (8) How are our decisions on use of land linked to our corporate plan?

The Council always had regard to the Local Plan. A Cabinet report would be submitted to members to decide what to do with our land assets.

- (9) Do we involve local members or Parish Councils in identifying land that could be used by the Council say for housing?

The Committee were advised that local members would be written to where necessary and stakeholders would be consulted with. This would usually depend on the value of the land but the Strategy was fairly clear on consulting with members.

- (10) What are the main barriers in the Authority to the identifying available land and/or disposal of land?

The Committee were advised that there was not any barriers in identifying land but this could be affected by conflicting demands on a particular site from different departments.

- (11) How well is the Disposals and Acquisitions policy working?

The Committee were advised that the Disposal and Acquisitions Policy was well laid out and stated the process clearly.

- (12) If we dispose, develop or retain land how is this linked to the Disposal and Acquisition Policy?

The Disposals and Acquisitions Policy was currently being drafted.

- (13) What costs are involved in keeping land we own, do any generate income?

The costs involved in keeping land we owned was the maintenance of small pieces of land but the costs would be higher for the whole portfolio.

- (14) What is the net cost of our garages after rental and other costs have been deducted?

Not applicable.

- (15) How do we avoid the mass sell-off of land assets to private developers and are there alternative ways to generate income?

The Committee were advised that this would be dependent on the objectives for the land. The Council were able to enter into development or joint ventures from which the Council would get a land value percentage.

- (16) How can new social housing be locked into a new local plan in light of the planning legislation changes?

The Committee were advised that the planners would incorporate provisions on affordable housing.

- (17) How can we benefit from the example of other Council's provision of affordable housing and the information systems they use for asset management?

The Committee were advised that through the Local Plan and joint ventures, the Council could control the level of affordable housing in the District.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the Senior Estate and Valuation Officer for contributing to the review.

RESOLVED – That the responses gathered as part of the Scrutiny Review into Vacant Land be noted.

(Members/Overview and Scrutiny Manager)

412 Additional Urgent Items

There were no additional urgent items to be considered at the meeting.

413 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Growth Scrutiny Committee will take place on Tuesday 12 January 2015 at 10.00 am in Chamber 1.