

## **Minutes of the Urban Environment Scrutiny Committee**

**Monday 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2015 at 6.00 pm**  
**in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley**

### **Present:**

Councillor D Tyler (Chair)  
Councillor A Finch (Vice Chair)  
Councillors J Cowell, W Duckworth, C Hale, P Harley, I Kettle, P Miller, R Scott-Dow and E Taylor.

### **Officers:**

P Coyne (Chief Officer – Planning & Economic Development), W George (Economic Development Manager), H Martin (Head of Planning), J Scott (Principal Executive Support Officer) (Directorate of Place) and H Shepherd (Democratic Services Officer) (Directorate of Resources and Transformation).

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#### 23      **Apology for absence**

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor N Gregory.

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#### 24      **Appointment of Substitute Member**

It was noted that Councillor P Harley had been appointed as a substitute member for Councillor N Gregory for this meeting of the Committee only.

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#### 25      **Declarations of Interest**

No member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

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#### 26      **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2015, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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#### 27      **Public Forum**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

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## **Inward Investment in Dudley Borough and the Black Country**

A report of the Scrutiny Committee Lead Officer was submitted outlining recommendations for Members to consider for implementation in 2015/16.

The Economic Development Manager presented the report and gave a background of the inward investment activities that had been considered by the Urban Environment Scrutiny Committee and Working Group during 2014/15.

In referring to the recommendations outlined in the report, the Economic Development Manager stated that comments that had been raised by Members at previous Committee meetings and those received by email, had all been incorporated into the proposed recommendations.

Following the presentation of the report, the Chief Officer (Planning & Economic Development) commended the Economic Development Manager and his team for work undertaken during the scrutiny process and considered it to have been a valuable exercise in establishing a work programme to further develop the service.

In response to a question raised by a Member, the Chief Officer (Planning & Economic Development) confirmed that the office space available for investment at the Waterfront was in the region of 200,000m<sup>2</sup>, but that he was unable to confirm the current capacity for the whole of the Borough. The Chief Officer (Planning & Economic Development) agreed to provide this information, direct to Members, following the meeting. It was stated that the Point North landmark building located at the Waterfront had now been developed into residential luxury flats and it was anticipated that this development would encourage activity back into the Waterfront and that the next stage of regenerating the area would now be progressed.

A Member further commented that employers also looked at facilities that were available within the vicinity, such as leisure centres, when making an investment and considered the facilities currently provided required improvement and suggested that a more attractive amenity infra-structure be developed.

The Chief Officer (Planning & Economic Development) agreed with the comments made and referred to the on-going Dudley Town Centre regeneration project and the proposed Castle Hill Leisure development. It was expected that these projects would have a positive impact in attracting people into the Borough and enhance the visitor economy.

In referring to the Very Light Rail (VLR) line that is planned to be introduced linking Castle Hill to Dudley Port, the Chief Officer (Planning & Economic Development) considered it important to develop the transport link in the context of the scope for expansion of office space at Brierley Hill and in connecting Castle Hill to Birmingham's visitor economy. It was stated that the first phase of the proposal was to implement a passenger train service to Dudley port, allowing an easier connection to Birmingham and the second phase would be to link the VLR to Brierley Hill. This would enable better connectivity and enhance

the public transport offer for residents, visitors and workers.

The Chair was mindful that a number of leisure centres had ceased to operate over recent years but commented that Local Authorities were no longer in a financial position to fund all these services and that investment opportunities in developing sport and leisure facilities in the borough needed to be encouraged.

In response to a question raised by a Member in relation to whether The Waterfront property owners were providing a reduction in rent as they were in receipt of a two year rate relief period, the Economic Development Manager stated that whilst INTU was the main owner within The Waterfront area, there were also a number of private owners. The majority of property owners acknowledged that a reduction in rent was an option to attract business investment, but were not compelled to be a part of the Dudley Business Investment Zone initiative.

Arising from a question raised by a Member, the Chief Officer (Planning and Economic Development) stated that all specifications for the next round of European Funding should be announced over the next few weeks; applications for funding will need to be submitted by the end of May 2015.

In response to further questions raised, the Economic Development Manager confirmed that the Dudley Business First website received approximately 8500 hits during 2013/14. He however reported that the number of hits had reduced slightly for 2014/15 but that visitors were viewing the site for longer periods of time; that enquiries were received via email and telephone contacts; that a trial period for people viewing the website was currently being undertaken and would provide more information in relation to who was looking at the site; collaborative working with Dudley's marketing team would continue to encourage further hits to the website and make Dudley Business First a recognised brand name; that automated emails were not sent to people expressing an interest, but that local businesses were automatically registered onto the local business directory and would always be made aware of a service suitable to their required needs.

In referring to the presentation given by Wayne Langford of Invest Black Country at the Scrutiny Committee meeting in December 2014 and in response to a question raised by the Chair, the Economic Development Manager confirmed that Invest Black Country would continue to exist until December 2016 and Wayne Langford would continue in his role as Head of Investment, Programmes and Development.

In referring to recommendation 3 of the report submitted, the Chair commented that when prospective international investors visited Dudley, Civic Leaders should play a part in promoting the borough as a development opportunity.

In response to a further question from the Chair, the Economic Development Manager confirmed that the Dudley Business First web address had been included on Business rate bills, but due to statutory information required to be included, no further information could be attached. It was also stated that Dudley Business First were proposing to work with Business Rates to be

automatically informed of any new businesses that were established within the Borough.

Resolved

That the following outcomes be recommended to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, for implementation in 2015/16:-

(1) Member awareness of inward investment activities

That updates on current and proposed inward investment activities, at both a local and regional level, be embedded into existing and periodic updates to Members.

(2) Partnership working with Invest Black Country

That close working with Invest Black Country, in line with the Collaboration Agreement, be continued, to ensure:

- the Council work closely with UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) to continue to attract inward investment enquiries received at a national level;
- greater co-ordination of delegation visits to the Borough
- local development opportunities for prospective investors are promoted by Invest Black Country to a national and international audience;
- the Borough is promoted as an inward investment location via appropriate social media channels; and
- the Black Country Bullet website (Dudley MBC-led) is promoted as an inward investment tool to showcase the strengths of the automotive sector within Dudley and the Black Country.

(3) Promoting the Borough to an international audience

That work with the Government's Regeneration Investment Organisation (RIO) and Invest Black Country to better promote the Borough's strengths and development opportunities to prospective international investors, be continued.

The RIO, launched in November 2013, works on behalf of UK Trade and Investment to:

- identify and assess credible UK regeneration opportunities;
- promote UK regeneration opportunities at an international level; and
- support investors and facilitate regeneration investment deals.

(4) Secure external funding to increase inward investment

That close working with the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Black Country local authorities to identify external funding opportunities for inward investment and regeneration projects, be continued. This will build on the Council's successes to date in securing European funding (via the 2007-2013 Programme), Regional Growth Fund, City Deal and Local Growth Fund to support inward investment activities and wider regeneration developments. Key funding opportunities for 2015/16 include: -

- future rounds of Local Growth Fund (the Council in partnership with Warwick Manufacturing Group has recently secured £4.5m to support the development and delivery of the Very Light Rail project); and
- the next round of European Funding (up to 2020) – call for new proposals to commence 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2015.

(5) Capacity within the Economic Development Team

That staff resources available to the Economic Development Team be reviewed through the budget review process. In addition, the current restructure proposals offer the opportunity to create greater synergies between services and enhance capacity as a result.

(6) Dudley Business Investment Zone

That close working with Invest Black Country, Marketing Birmingham, INTU (owners of the Merry Hill Shopping Centre) and local property agents to further market the Waterfront and business rate incentive scheme to encourage take up of vacant office space, be continued.

(7) Point of contact for prospective inward investors

That Dudley Business First continues to act as the single point of contact for receiving and handling inward investment enquiries.

To further enhance the Dudley Business First website by promoting Invest Black Country and undertake further analysis of website users to better understand the residence and sector of users (trial period now live for a period of one month at nil cost).

(8) Unique selling points of the Borough

That a refresh of the 'unique selling points' of the Borough focused based on the following areas, be undertaken :

- Pipeline regeneration projects
- Transport, rail and air accessibility
- Sector strengths
- Workforce
- Education strengths - drawing on the recent successes of Dudley College (Centre for Advanced Building Technologies and Construction Skills) and Halesowen College (Advanced Science, Engineering and Technology Centre) in securing Growth Deal funding
- Broadband availability
- The lifestyle strengths of Dudley Borough (visitor economy, housing, culture and green spaces)

(9) Supporting existing businesses to invest

That support to local businesses continue to be invested by:

- Continuing to provide a single point of contact for business support and inward investment enquiries via Dudley Business First;
- Providing assistance in sourcing and securing grant and/or loan assistance to expand (e.g. Regional Growth Fund);
- Enabling local businesses to promote their products and services for free via the Dudley Borough Business Directory;
- Assisting businesses to source locally available land and property within the Borough; and
- Signposting businesses to the relevant support offered locally, regionally and nationally.

As this was the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in the 2014/15 municipal year, the Chair expressed his thanks to the Scrutiny Committee Members, Lead Officer to the Scrutiny Committee, Officers and the Clerk, for the support and active role that everyone had played during the Scrutiny process.

The meeting ended at 6.45pm.