

COMMUNITY SAFETY AND HOUSING PORTFOLIO DECISION RECORD 2 September 2011

The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

The Mayor, Stuart Drummond (Community Safety and Housing Portfolio Holder)

Officers: Damien Wilson, Assistant Director (Regeneration and Planning)
Sally Forth, Community Safety Manager
Gary Hutchison, Building Control Manager
Sylvia Pinkney, Public Protection Manager
Chris Pipe, Planning Services Manager
Sarah Scarr, Landscape Planning and Conservation Manager
Tom Britcliffe, Principal Planning Officer
Gemma Day, Principal Regeneration Officer
Amy Waller, Principal Housing Regeneration Officer
Martin Spaldin, Empty Homes Officer
Helen Williams, Planning Officer
Jo Stubbs, Democratic Services Officer

6. Amended Charges for Building Control *Assistant Director (Regeneration and Planning)*

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To update the Portfolio Holder on the position in respect of Building Control charges and to seek agreement to the proposed new charges with effect from 1st January 2012.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The Building Control Manager advised that the 1998 regulations had been replaced by 'The Building (Local Authority) Regulations 2010' introducing a new more flexible approach to setting charges based on the actual surveyor input time for chargeable work. This should allow Local Authorities to compete more effectively with Approved Inspectors (private Building Control providers) to win work. These latest regulations require Authorities to set charges at such a level to fully recover their relevant costs for fee earning work. Much work had been done to ensure as far as possible that the new charges would cover the current costs for the fee earning portion of the

service whilst keeping any charge increases to a minimum thereby ensuring the Council remain competitive both in cost and service delivery against private building control providers.

As the charging system was based on the Council achieving full cost recovery for the chargeable element of the service each year it was proposed that the Council hourly rate be set at £56 excluding VAT. This might need to be reviewed periodically to ensure it remained adequate. Each charge had been calculated using the hourly rate multiplied by the number of hours of work involved for specific application types. Building Control charges would be reviewed each year and as before the income from charging should equal the cost of the fee earning element of the Building Control Service over any 3 year rolling period.

Decision

That the proposed new Building Control Charges Scheme be adopted from 1st January 2012.

7. Briarfields Paddock and the Former Ambulance Station Draft Planning and Development Brief *Assistant Director (Regeneration and Planning)*

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To seek Portfolio Holder endorsement to the draft planning and development brief for Briarfields Paddock and the adjacent former Ambulance Station and request authorisation to carry out public consultation on the draft brief

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

In July 2009 Cabinet agreed in principle to dispose of the Council-owned Briarfields Paddock. The adjacent former Ambulance Station is owned by the North East Ambulance Service and they had agreed to include the site in their brief for Briarfields Paddock in order to ensure that any future developments would be compatible. The brief was appended to the report. It was proposed that this be put out to public consultation and amended accordingly before being brought back to a subsequent portfolio meeting.

The Portfolio Holder queried the timescale. The Planning Officer advised that the consultation would be completed in September with a further Portfolio Holder report expected October/November.

Decision

That the draft planning and development brief be approved for the purposes of public consultation.

8. Empty Homes Strategy Update *Assistant Director (Regeneration and Planning)*

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To update the Portfolio Holder of the development of the Empty Homes Strategy and the implementation of the Empty Homes Action Plan 2010 to 2015 to bring long term empty homes back into use.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

Cabinet approved the adoption of the Hartlepool Empty Homes Strategy and associated action plan in May 2010. The report provided an update of the progress of the strategy and action plan 2010 to 2015. A summary was given of the enforcement and incentive options available to bring empty properties back into use and details were given of the progress in tackling long term empty properties within Hartlepool. A copy of the Action Plan was appended to the report and details of the top 20 empty properties in Hartlepool were given in a confidential appendix. The Assistant Director highlighted the need to go through set procedures when taking enforcement action and the time this could take. The Portfolio Holder commented that these actions were clearly taking effect as he had already been contacted by landlords whose properties appeared on the list.

The Portfolio Holder praised officers for their efforts which he described as quite innovative. As funding for housing market renewal had dried up it was vital that these empty homes were brought back into use. Nice streets were being adversely affected by a few empty properties. All members had been invited to this Portfolio meeting as this was a meeting which affected all wards and he asked that officers keep all members updated on any subsequent progress. The Assistant Director indicated that further progress reports would be brought to future portfolio meetings.

Decision

That the contents of the report and progress on the associated action plan be noted and the proposed work plan for 2011/12 endorsed.

9. Heritage At Risk Register for Hartlepool *Assistant Director (Regeneration and Planning)*

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To outline proposals to establish a register of 'heritage at risk' for Hartlepool which brings together a list of heritage assets at risk within a single local authority area.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The Landscape Planning and Conservation Manager reported that English Heritage were encouraging local authorities to monitor heritage in their area and compile local registers of Heritage at Risk. The report outlined how a register would be established and the methodology which would be used to assess buildings. The owners of buildings on the Heritage at Risk register would be notified and invited to comment on their inclusion. The proposed methodology was appended to the report. The final list, which would be reviewed annually, would be brought to a future portfolio meeting for agreement.

The Portfolio Holder queried whether English Heritage would help fund restoration of any buildings at risk. The Landscape Planning and Conservation Manager advised that including these buildings on a register would help to raise their profile and could serve as an aid should any future funding become available. The Assistant Director noted that having one list would also be helpful for developers. The Portfolio Holder requested that the Town Wall on the Headland be included following advice from consultants of sea damage risk. The Landscape Planning and Conservation Manager to look at this.

Decision

That the processes outlined in the report to establish a Heritage at Risk Register for Hartlepool be agreed.

10. Introduction of charges for pre-application advice and monitoring of planning legal agreement *Assistant Director (Regeneration and Planning)*

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To seek agreement to the schedule of fees proposed for the introduction of a charging policy for pre-application advice and for the monitoring of legal agreements associated with planning consents.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The Planning Services Manager advised that it was proposed to introduce

charges for pre-application advice and the monitoring of legal agreements associated with planning consents. The Planning Services Team currently offered a free advisory service (the One Stop Shop), however current financial circumstances plus the officer time involved in providing this service meant it was felt expedient to introduce charges. These charges, which were appended to the report, would vary depending upon the nature of the development. It was proposed that there be no charge for pre-application advice for household developments unless a rapid response was required. Careful monitoring of legal agreements is required to ensure that obligations are complied with, it is proposed to introduce charges, based on the type of monitoring required, these will be incorporated into legal agreement as necessary, proposed charges were provided in the report. These proposals had been considered by Planning Committee who had requested a 6 monthly review as well as the recommendation by officers for an annual review, it was proposed that the Planning Services Manager presents a report to the Planning Committee at the appropriate time. It was also recommended by the Planning Committee that the fees received be kept within the department for the first year to cover the cost of providing the service, as this was a non-profit levy of fee.

Decision

That the proposed scale of fees for pre-application advice and monitoring of legal agreements be implemented and that a review of the policy be carried out after 1 year or as soon as practicable.

11. Talking Cameras *Assistant Director (Neighbourhood Services)*

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To seek approval of the Portfolio Holder to introduce "Talking Cameras" in addition to the existing use of CCTV provision within the Town Centre Area.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The report explained how the introduction of Talking Cameras would be trialled in the Town Centre area as part of the approach to dealing with the night time economy. Details were given of how and where the system could operate and similar initiatives underway elsewhere across England.

The Portfolio Holder noted the officer recommendations and rationale behind them however felt unable to support them in light of the current economic climate. He acknowledged that the necessary equipment was already in place and was happy to approve its use for emergency announcements but did not want it to be used in the management of daytime street behaviour or the night-time economy. The Portfolio Holder was concerned that 'Big Brother' tactics

of this sort could lead to a loss of public confidence and would therefore only wish them to be used as a means of public reassurance.

Decision

That the “Talking Cameras” trial be rejected and that the equipment currently in place only be used for future emergency announcements.

12. Trading Standards Service Plan 2011/12 *Assistant Director (Regeneration and Planning)*

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To consider the Trading Standards Service Plan for 2011/12

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The report set out details of the Trading Standards Service Plan for 2011/12. A copy of the plan was appended to the report.

The Portfolio Holder highlighted the prosecution of 1 off-licence. The Public Protection Manager indicated that the age of those trying to buy alcohol was a factor as adults attempting to buy for children was a police matter. Recently Public Protection had been investigating whether certain premises were adhering to the Challenge 21 policy. It was also noted that investigations of this type were resource intensive, involving large numbers of staff and training of youngsters. The Portfolio Holder referred to previous problems with the recruitment of Trading Standards staff. The Public Protection Manager indicated that while there were still national shortages Hartlepool currently had a full complement of Trading Standards Officers albeit that one was still not fully qualified.

The Portfolio Holder queried whether there had been any recent increase in doorstep sales. The Public Protection Manager advised that the quality of work being carried out tended to be more of an issue at the moment and doorstep crime itself was increasingly rare.

Decision

That the Trading Standards Service Plan 2011/12 be approved.

13. Baden Street Improvement Scheme Proposal Assistant Director (Regeneration and Planning)

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To propose the details of the pilot improvement scheme for Baden Street which if successful could be applied to other areas in the town and seek endorsement of the approach.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

Baden Street was currently experiencing very low levels of housing demand. Of 45 properties (43 of which were in the privately rented sector) 22 were empty. The condition of these properties was generally very poor leading to a downward spiral of confidence and declining reputation reinforcing the low demand for housing in the area. These problems were exacerbated by the empty houses becoming targets for vandalism, theft and anti social behaviour. Although concentrated in Baden Street there was concern that left unchecked these problems may intensify and spread to neighbouring streets. Local residents had indicated the need for further action and in 2009/10 the Safer Hartlepool Strategic Assessment identified Baden Street as a priority area. It had also been identified as an annual priority within the housing section of the Town Centre Communities Neighbourhood Plan. The complete Business Case was appended to the report. The first phase would address the concentrated problems and focus on bringing the empty properties back into use. £160,000 funding had been identified from the Council's unsupported corporate prudential borrowing however it was highlighted that only £35,000 of this was not expected to be recouped.

The Portfolio Holder referred to recent publicity surrounding this improvement scheme and expressed disappointment that the press were not in attendance to report the facts. He felt that £35,000 to bring a street back into use was a small price to pay and that the public should be made aware that amounts previously quoted were not strictly accurate. The Assistant Director would highlight these points with the editor of the Hartlepool Mail and look at a report going into the press when the improvement scheme went live. The Portfolio Holder was also keen to have college apprentices involved in any building work. However the Assistant Director felt procurement rules might preclude this. Furthermore it might be more cost efficient for the Council to undertake the work themselves.

Decision

That the detailed project proposal be endorsed and commitment given in principle to the use of capital resources as outlined in section 4 of the report.

14. Housing Starts and Completions Update *Assistant Director
(Regeneration and Planning)*

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To detail housing starts and completions in the Borough for quarter 1 of 2011-2012.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The report explained why the Council monitor housing starts and completions and how this information is used in a number of key functions for which the Portfolio Holder has responsibility. Details were given of the starts and completions for the last quarter comparing these with past performance and explaining what this might mean for future build rates and housing supply in Hartlepool. The Principal Planning Officer explained that public sector funding had sustained the levels of starts and completions in recent years through the economic downturn, however these schemes were building out now and there would need to be more reliance on private sector housing delivery. The Portfolio Holder asked that officers include empty homes brought back into use in future figures rather than just new build properties. The Assistant Director was happy to bring back a combined report but the Principal Planning Officer highlighted that the Government would not class empty homes being brought back into use as new homes, despite that point being made in the consultation. It was agreed to include empty homes brought back into use in future Housing update reports.

Decision

That the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 9.05am.

PETER DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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