



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5pm to 6.45pm

8 April 2014

Present: Councillors Stephenson (chair), Maxwell (vice chair), Bradford, Brociek-Coulton, Carlo, Galvin, Howard, Manning, Sands (S) and Storie

Also present: Councillor Wright (signatory of the call in request) and Vicky Manthorpe of the Norwich Society (Councillors Boswell and Grahame, additional signatories of the call in request were not able to attend the meeting.)

Apologies: Councillor Brimblecombe

1. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Lubbock declared an interest as the chair of the Norwich Preservation Trust.

2. HERITAGE INVESTMENT STRATEGY – SCRUTINY CALL IN

The chair explained the process which would be followed for the call in meeting.

The councillors who requested the call in were invited to address the committee and explain their reasons for bringing the cabinet decision to the scrutiny committee. Councillor Galvin explained that the Heritage Investment Strategy was a very important piece of work and she was looking to make it as robust as possible. She has three areas of concern:

- Was there full consultation with heritage organisations and did they see a final draft of the strategy?
- Were enough checks and balances built into the strategy to ensure that assets were not sold without proper consultation?
- That ward councillor input be clearly defined in the strategy.

Councillor Wright agreed that it was an excellent strategy. He said that there was only one opportunity to get the strategy right and that it was important that scrutiny played a role in this.

Councillor Carlo agreed that the strategy was welcome and much needed as some of the city's heritage assets were in a state of disrepair. She was concerned about

the process followed for the consultation including the list of assets and why important buildings such as those in Elm Hill were not included as stewardship properties.

The chair read out comments received from Councillor Grahame who was unable to attend the meeting. Councillor Grahame supported the work on the strategy but had concerns about the checks and balances included in the strategy and the selection of the stewardship properties.

The leader of the council said that the *Heritage Investment Strategy* was instigated following scrutiny of the Asset Management Strategy. She gave a timeline of the project which began in the summer of 2012 and included two draft documents which were shown to key stakeholders for comment. Shadow portfolio holders were also made aware of the draft document by email in December 2012. A steering group led by the deputy leader of the council and senior officers addressed issues raised by stakeholders. The technical work to identify heritage assets and the consultation was delayed until after the elections. Councillors from all groups expressed interest in attending meetings discussing the strategy. Ward councillors were informed of proposed disposal following scrutiny of the overarching asset management strategy. She confirmed that the role of Norfolk Property Services (NPS) was as a professional advisor only and that cabinet would continue to make final decisions.

The cabinet member for Environment, development and transport said that two stakeholder meetings had taken place to discuss the strategy. The final document was for internal use and was intended in part to support bids for funding as part of the *Asset Management Strategy*. Checks and balances had been included as there was a process for acquiring and disposing of assets included in the overarching *Asset Management Strategy* so did not need to be repeated in the *Heritage Investment Strategy*. All decisions would have to be approved by cabinet, ward members would be informed and there was always the opportunity for decisions to be called in to scrutiny.

During discussion, officers responded to the comments from members signing the call in and questions from the scrutiny committee.

The Head of planning said that one of the main reasons for putting the strategy together was to have a comprehensive list of the city's heritage assets. He referred members to the key criteria for identifying stewardship properties and explained that housing assets did not tend to meet these criteria, which was why very few housing assets were included in the stewardship properties. The heritage investment strategy would allow income to be maximised to maintain the stewardship properties.

He said that he was not aware of any immediate deadlines which would be prejudiced by a failure to adopt the strategy immediately, although some trigger points within the strategy could need more resources to be completed in a shorter time frame which would have a financial impact. He reminded members that it was a working document and would be reviewed periodically.

The list of stewardship properties was available on the Norwich City Council website as an appendix to the *Heritage Investment Strategy* and the criteria for stewardship was discussed at stakeholder meetings. Although some stakeholders wished that the financial position of the council were different to enable more funding for heritage

assets, none had raised concerns that the balance of the stewardship and non-stewardship properties was not correct. Stakeholders had raised the possibility of a different approach being taken to areas where there were 'clusters' of historic buildings, such as Elm Hill. However, this was considered likely to complicate the strategy and the issue was addressed by the preparation of maps included in the appendix to draw attention to these clusters.

After the stakeholder meetings, some suggestions made had been incorporated, however, there was no significant change to the draft strategy. Notes were taken of the stakeholder meetings and were agreed by stakeholders. No final copy of the strategy was sent to the stakeholders; however, the item was on the cabinet forward agenda which was published on the council's website as part of the cabinet agenda papers. He said that stakeholders were partners in the in developing the strategy but the final content was for Norwich City Council to decide as the heritage assets belong to the city.

The deputy chief executive said that the biggest challenge to the council was resourcing the heritage assets and this was currently funded through revenue and capital budgets. A programmed approach to maintaining the assets had been adopted. The *Heritage Investment Strategy* helped to secure additional external funding for these assets and would make funds available for a wider range of repairs. The strategy for disposal of assets was to look at properties on a rolling basis so there was not a list of assets marked for disposal. When assets were identified for disposal, the ward members were made aware and the decision would have to be approved by cabinet. He reassured members that only a few assets were disposed of as the emphasis was to maintain properties.

Vicky Manthorpe, a representative of the Norwich Society was invited to address the committee and to answer questions. She said that the Norwich Society welcomed the heritage investment strategy and was pleased with the invitation to be a stakeholder. She said that she would have liked to have seen a more fundamental plan for the heritage maintenance. She had asked for written comments submitted by other stakeholders but did not receive these. She had been concerned that a clearer definition of the criteria for identifying stewardship properties was needed and would have liked to have input into the properties picked for stewardship. She confirmed that a final draft of the strategy had not been received by the society but if it had have been, final comments would have been submitted to the council. As this did not happen, she was not able to see if comments submitted by the Norwich Society had been taken on board for the final copy.

The leader of the council said that it was discourteous not to have sent out a final copy to stakeholders and apologised for this but reminded the committee that a final draft would have been for information only and not for further comment.

Councillor Bradford moved that a vote be taken on whether the strategy should be referred back to cabinet for further review and was seconded by Councillor Storie.

RESOLVED :

- 1) With nine voting in favour, not to refer the heritage investment strategy back to cabinet,

- 2) To ask officers to ensure that final versions of documents with stakeholder input were sent out to relevant organisations well in advance of meetings,
- 3) To ensure that Norwich City Council made the consultation process as clear as possible to all stakeholders so they are aware of how the council will conduct the process,
- 4) Ensure that stakeholders are aware at the beginning of the consultation process about their level of involvement and input; and
- 5) To thank all non-committee members for attending the meeting and for contributing to the meeting.

CHAIR