

## THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **South Oxhey Steering Committee** held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Rickmansworth, on Monday 04 July 2016 from 7.30pm to 8.57pm.

Present: Councillors Ann Shaw OBE (Chairman), Eric Bishop, David Coltman, Stephen Cox, Stephen King.

Councillor Joan King - Herts County Council  
Councillor Pam King - Watford Rural Parish Council.

Officers in attendance:

Geof Muggeridge - Director of Community & Environmental Services  
Alan Head - Head of Major Projects  
Mike Simpson - Committee & Web Officer

Also in attendance: Councillors Rupert Barnes, Angela Killick, Andrew Scarth.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Martin Trevett, Matthew Bedford and Alison Scarth.

### **SO01/16 APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIRMAN FOR THE MEETING**

It was proposed that in the absence of Councillor Martin Trevett, Cllr Ann Shaw OBE be appointed as Chairman for the meeting. The proposal was seconded.

### **SO02/16 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the South Oxhey Steering Committee held on 7 March 2016 were confirmed as a correct record.

### **SO03/16 PROGRESS REPORT**

The Committee received a presentation on the South Oxhey Initiative from the Head of Major Projects, which was divided into three sections; Current Events, Milestones and Issues.

#### **Current Events**

This slide detailed significant dates for the project, one of which was the 27 May deadline for the submission of objections to the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO), of which there were 12.

It was stated that the Judicial Review period would end on 12 July, after which challenges were inadmissible.

With reference to the re-housing surgeries to be held by Home Group for Thrive tenants on 21<sup>st</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> July, the Chairman asked how residents would be informed of them. The Head of Major Projects replied that all affected residents would be written to.

A Member asked what arrangements would be made for residents unable to make either of the proposed surgery dates, and it was stated that provision would be made for those unavailable to attend the planned meetings.

A Member asked what was meant by a Commercial CPO, and it was explained that this referred to non-residential properties.

A Member asked how the compulsory purchase plans would affect the Garage/Car showroom on the site, and the Head of Major Projects said he had been in contact with the owner of the business, who had gone to the first Commercial CPO surgery and had appointed his own surveyor, and emphasised that dialogue was ongoing. The Head of Major Projects stated that it was not appropriate to discuss individual cases at this meeting, and the matter could be raised for the consideration of the South Oxhey Scrutiny Panel, the first meeting of which was scheduled for 25<sup>th</sup> July.

Upon the raising of concerns by a Member about negotiations with those affected by the CPOs, the Director of Community & Environmental Services assured the Committee that the Council was in positive dialogue with all concerned.

In responding to a question about the reduced number of retail outlets, the Head of Major Projects said that it was made clear from the outset of the project that of 60 shops on the site, more than 50% would be removed at the end of the development.

A Member asked about the plans for the Post Office, and the Head of Major Projects stated that negotiations were ongoing both with the old and new Postmaster, as the Council was very conscious of it being the only banking facility in South Oxhey.

A Member asked whether the fate of the CAB offices could be discussed at the meeting or whether this would be a matter for the Scrutiny Panel too. The Head of Major Projects replied that the Scrutiny Panel would look into such matters with a much greater degree of depth.

A Member asked what would happen to existing shops and the garage in Station Approach during the work, and it was replied that movement of premises in Station Approach and North Block would occur while redevelopment of the site took place.

The Head of Major Projects was asked what the breakdown was of the objections to the CPO, to which it was replied that eight were Commercial tenants, one was a residential tenant and three were utility providers. The Member expressed concern about the potential for unscrupulous activity by 'fly-by-night' lawyers trying to extract money for tenants, and the Head of Major Projects stated that surveyors were in place as part of the CPO process, and there was no evidence of unethical activity to date, and reiterated that the purpose of the surgeries was to begin and continue dialogue between the parties.

A question was asked regarding when retailers would be able to meet with officers and ward Councillors to discuss facets of the redevelopment plans, and in reply it was said that meetings were ongoing with tenants with commercial interests, and that it was time-prohibitive to involve Councillors in all discussions. Until Community Board negotiations were concluded, responsibility for the project would be that of the surveyors and officers.

A Member said that Councillors heard different things from the respective parties involved, and that a meeting was required to hear both sides of the arguments. Without this it was not possible to represent the interests of the public, especially as officers would not meet them. The Head of Major projects said that he would ensure discussions on the formation of the Community Board are concluded as soon as possible.

The Head of Major Projects explained the composition and the roles of the South Oxhey Project Board, and officer-led body chaired by the Chief Executive of Three Rivers District Council, and the South Oxhey Scrutiny Panel, which comprised Members of the three parties and would meet a week later, every four weeks, to oversee development and on-site construction, and consider the interests of residential and commercial tenants.

With reference to parking, the Head of Major Projects stated that the developer was obliged to supply a temporary car park for 55 of the current 75 spaces, and the remaining 20 would be perpendicular i.e. along street verges, and it was added that the Council had commissioned a public survey on the issue of permanent street parking. The Chairman asked to whom residents should write if they had concerns over this matter, and the Head of Major Projects replied that he would prefer to deal with all correspondence personally, preferably by email.

The Committee heard of two primary concerns of the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB), which at present occupied two floors of a building in South Oxhey into which advisors were 'packed in'. If purported plans to re-accommodate the bureau to the first floor of a smaller building were confirmed, it was claimed that it would be disastrous both for the agency and customers, as 40% of visitors were disabled and the impracticality of using a lift to convey them to the first floor was evident.

Ideally, CAB would acquire more space as its client base was increasing, and had grown by 9% on the previous year. To lose one third of its capacity, including the laying-off of trained advisors, would result in greater debt and more hardship to users of the service.

It was accepted that although the CAB did not bring direct financial return to the Council, the agency gained over £1 million in extra income for its clients in Three Rivers, thereby boosting the local economy. In addition, the sourcing of extra benefits led to a reduction in crime, and that that clients did not have to steal to feed their families and heat their houses. CAB was also instrumental in assisting residents with their Council Tax arrears, which realised a benefit to the Council.

The Chairman asked those present to vote on whether the CAB should be considered a special case, and it was carried unanimously. A Member said that adequate provision had to be made for the CAB.

The Head of Major Projects said it was not possible to meet the demands of all commercial interests, and at times it would be necessary to agree to disagree over matters, and if necessary with a referral to arbitration. He added that the subject of office space for CAB was part of the negotiations and nothing had yet been decided. It was reiterated that this meeting was not the forum for hearing individual cases, and that this example emphasised the point. This notwithstanding, the appropriate re-housing of CAB was to be a priority.

A Member commented that if someone from CAB had not brought their concerns to the meeting, Councillors representing the most deprived ward in the county would not have heard of plans to relocate it. The Head of Major Projects replied that relocation of CAB was not a definitive outcome, and that the subject would be discussed by the new Scrutiny Board. The Chairman asked whether the Scrutiny Board agendas will be circulated to all Members in advance of the meetings, to which the Head of Major Projects replied he saw no reason why not.

The Member asked to what depth the Scrutiny Panel will examine proceedings, and was informed it was a case of observing its reports in the first place and making adjustments as deemed necessary. The Member asked whether it was

known which tenants did not wish to stay in South Oxhey, and was informed that conversations had taken place with those tenants who had expressed a desire to stay.

In reply to another Member's question, the Head of Major Projects said that the objection of the CPO by the utility companies, and specifically the electricity sub-station, was an automatic process and standard practice, and was an indication of a wish to enter dialogue early.

It was further added that the Council was committed to responding in writing to each objector to the CPO.

### **Milestones**

The Head of Major Projects talked through the upcoming milestones, which included the beginning of the construction of satellite sites in September 2016, and included affordable housing on two sites, and the start of Phase 1A in October 2016, to provide residential properties

The CPO inquiry was due to end in November 2016, with the outcome announced between four and five months later – expected to be in March 2017.

### **Issues**

The Head of Major Projects presented the committee with a number of issues due to arise, which included the establishment of a Community Board to replace the South Oxhey Steering Committee.

It was explained that the local Community Board was to replace the South Oxhey Steering Committee, its primary purpose to deliver an effective communication channel between the developer and residents.

The Head of Major Projects drew the Committee's attention to the aims and objectives within the draft constitution, and explained that the document was based largely on the agreement used successfully by Countryside Properties plc in another project.

Attention was also drawn to the terms of Membership, and that meetings of the new Board would be public, with pre-ordained and pre-published agendas. It was intended that the South Oxhey Community Board be in place at the time of the commencement of construction in September 2016, and the final meeting of the South Oxhey Steering Committee followed shortly thereafter by the inaugural meeting of the South Oxhey Community Board.

A Member asked how residential and commercial tenants would get a say on who sits on the forum, and was directed to item 5 of the draft constitution which explained that an initial (shadow) meeting of the Board would take place in September 2016, at which time the process for co-opting residential and commercial tenants will be proposed, with successful representatives to be appointed at the time of the first AGM of the new Board in November 2016.

Meetings of the Community Board would take place every two months.

A Member asked whether it would be necessary for Members of the Community Board to attend all meetings, and was referred to the Code of Conduct under which a member of the Board may be disqualified if deemed appropriate.

The Head of Major Projects concluded the meeting by informing the Committee that the meeting of the Full Council on 12 July 2016 would formally confirm the disbanding of the South Oxhey Steering Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the information provided be noted.

**SO04/16 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

**CHAIRMAN**