

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL
CORPORATE SERVICES AND ECONOMIC GROWTH
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in the Meeting Space, Block 1, Floor 2, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF on Monday, 11 April 2022 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillor D Bawn
(Chairman in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Beynon, J.
Dunn, E.
Ezhilchelvan, P.

Oliver, N.
Robinson, M.
Taylor, C.
Wallace, A.

OFFICERS

Binjal, S.
Black, M.

Bowman, D.

Earle, R.
Greally, R.

Mowbray, A.
Nicholson, S.
O'Farrell, R.
Rolton, P.
Willis, J.

Monitoring Officer
Director of Economic Growth &
Investments
Ascent Homes Development
Director
Chief Operating Officer
Assistant Democratic Services
Officer
Head of Project Management
Scrutiny Co-ordinator
Executive Director
British Volt
Executive Director of Finance
(Section 151 Officer)

17. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors P. Jackson and M. Murphy.

18. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7 March 2021, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

20. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

The Forward Plan of forthcoming Key Cabinet decisions was reported to the Committee. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix A).

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan of key decisions be noted

21. BLYTH RELIEF ROAD

R. O'Farrell, Executive Director, introduced the report to committee. It gave an update on the Blyth Relief Road and outlined the funding that will be needed for the option 5 route. Councillor W. Ploszaj, Portfolio holder for Business added that it was a much needed road in Blyth and will be beneficial to the County.

The following comments were made in response to member's questions:-

- Members welcomed the proposals set out in the report given the longstanding traffic congestion problems in and around Blyth.
- Members acknowledged that Route 3 was no longer viable due to risks from housing developments. Route 5 was now the most viable option.
- It was acknowledged that Route 5 was on the periphery of the congestion area, however Members were assured that there were amendments to Route 5 to help alleviate congestion.
- Officers confirmed that Route 5 was the only viable option as it was the only route that matched the cost to benefit analysis and other routes may not have secured funding from Central Government. Officers were confident that the funding would be approved and confirmed that discussions had with the Department of Transport had been positive.
- Members were assured that there would be a full public consultation on the proposed route and the programme of the consultation would be shared with Members.
- Members were assured that there was a strong commitment from the Administration to complete the work, but a date of completion could not be given.
- Paragraph 7 of the report outlined the improvements that would be made to Route 5. Officers assured Members that there would be joined up working within other services to ensure work was not duplicated throughout the scheme.

RESOLVED members agreed to note and support the recommendations in the report.

24. ADVANCE NORTHUMBERLAND

R. O'Farrell, Executive Director, introduced the Advance team to committee. It was explained that Advance had presented at Informal Cabinet and NALC and they had been well received, therefore it was thought beneficial to present to committee.

R. Earle, Chief Operating Officer, introduced the presentation to committee. The presentation gave an overview of Advance Northumberland as a company and highlighted activities undertaken by different sectors. The presentation gave information regarding the Advance Northumberland Estate including commercial and residential properties in their portfolios.

D. Brown, Ascent Homes Development Director, gave an overview of the Housing Regeneration work. It outlined schemes that had been delivered and up-coming schemes in the pipeline. It showed the proportions of private sale and affordable housing within these schemes.

A. Mowbray, Head of Project Management, gave an insight into the project management work carried out by Advance Northumberland Developments. They outlined the companies they had worked with which included Active Northumberland. The work illustrated how Advance Northumberland Developments had a skilled and experienced team with a proven track record of successful completed projects and there were £150 million of committed projected running to 2025 in the pipeline.

M. Black, Director of Economic Growth & Investments, presented how Advance Northumberland supported businesses across the County. The presentation showed strategic employment sites and enterprise zones including Northumberland Energy Park. It also gave a summary of Key Town projects including Amble Retail Park and Tyne View Retail Park in Prudhoe.

The following comments were made in response to Members questions: -

- Officers confirmed that Ashington College was relocated to the Wansbeck Business Park after they approached Advance, it would have been preferable to keep the Business Park for employment only however there were benefits to the location.
- Members thanked Officers for the detailed presentation and asked if a presentation could be brought to Scrutiny on an annual basis to give a yearly update which Officers were happy to oblige.
- Discussions were on-going regarding the acquisition of the Priestpopple site. Planners were creating a development brief to outline what would be appropriate on the site in conjunction with adjacent developments.
- Officers acknowledged that the Real Estate industry was a male orientated industry and had schemes in place to try and overcome this. There was a rising stars project which gave training and development for internal progression. It was confirmed that ¼ of the Senior Team were female and there were 2 female board members with another female member joining soon.
- Officers confirmed that the costing fronts were being monitored on projects in response to the cost of living rising to ensure investments were economically viable.

- Officers confirmed that the Council would be responsible to create schemes to combat issues of sustainability in rural areas and then Advance would implement this.
- Officers confirmed that affordable housing was rented out through social housing companies.
- Discussions were on-going between Advance and the Council regarding delivering a large part of the affordable housing that was set out in the Council budget.
- Members were assured that everywhere industrially was in high demand and across the industrial portfolio there hadn't been a higher occupancy before.
- Although the company works closely with the Council it was clarified to Members that company was autonomous with its own board.

25 BRITISH VOLT

P. Rolt, Executive Chairman of British Volt, introduced the presentation to committee. The detailed presentation gave an update on the project. It outlined the plans for the Gigaplant factory in Northumberland and the Supplier Park to support the factory. It also introduced the committee to the BV FutureGen Foundation which would hope to encourage people into a career at British Volt.

The following comments were made in response to Members questions:-

- Members thanked Officers for an excellent presentation, and shared their enthusiasm at the fantastic opportunity British Volt had brought to Northumberland.
- It was explained to Members that there were technical challenges when looking at producing a battery for HGV due to energy density but in the future there may be a way to produce one.
- Members were assured that British Volt wanted to be on the leading edge of battery production but it was also important to ensure the technology was sustainable. The senior team in the company were all leading experts and had many accolades for their work within the battery production sector highlighting the companies commitment to the longevity of the project.
- Members were assured that British Volt wanted to create jobs for local people. The Learning & Development team were already in place and were visiting schools to encourage the next generation into the industry through STEM learning.
- It was confirmed that the supplier park was to produce parts that were needed to make the product. The supplier park being in close proximity meant batteries would be produced more efficiently.
- Officers confirmed there would be no waste discharge from the factory. There would be a small amount of by-product which would be tinkered off site and processed elsewhere.
- Members were assured that partners of the company would break down the raw materials into the usable products.

24. MONITORING REPORT

The Committee received an update on its Monitoring Report for the 2021/22 council year.

RESOLVED that this information was noted.

Chairman

Date