

ROCHDALE SOUTH TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING Wednesday, 13 September 2023

PRESENT: Councillor P. Massey (Chair); Councillors S. Ahmed, Ali, Anstee, Arshad, E. Blundell, Gallagher, Meredith, Mohammed, Aasim Rashid, Aiza Rashid, A. Smith and Sullivan.

OFFICERS: S. Aiken (Highways), D. Gardner (Public Health), M. Gilray (Rochdale Development Agency), A. Johns (Environmental Management), A. Johnson (Committee Services), S. Morris (Housing – Place) and V. White (Townships).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Four members of the public.

10 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor R Massey.

11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

12 ITEMS FOR EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

There were no items for Exclusion of Public and Press.

13 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business.

14 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the following amendments, the minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2023 be approved as a correct record:

1. Present – Councillor S. Ahmed be added to the list of those present at the meeting.

15 OPEN FORUM

The following matters were raised as part of the Open Forum:

- a) Objection against application to reclassify an official public footpath into a bridleway

Mr T Mayne advised the committee regarding a public footpath to the back of Rochbury Close, Bamford which had been petitioned by a local bridle group to reclassify as a bridleway due to their claim of historic use. Local residents disputed the historic usage as well as the suitability of the footpath as a bridleway, citing health and safety risks as the footpath was only 2.5 metres wide, enclosed on either side by 6ft fences and was 680 metres long in a winding pattern, and that a bridleway as recommended by the horse society should be at least 4 metres wide.

Mr Mayne detailed contact with Rochdale Borough Council since 2017 and complained of a lack of timely response and that no due priority was given to residents' concerns.

The Head of Environmental Management advised the Committee that the complaint had been delayed but noted some delays were outside of officer's control, including delays as a result of the pandemic and subsequent delays of matters referred to the Planning Inspectorate. It was advised that the bridleway request application had been resubmitted to the planning inspectorate following amendments and was awaiting decision. The Committee was assured that the concerns were being treated as a priority and that the team would follow up with both Mr Mayne and the Planning Inspectorate on a regular basis.

The Chair expressed disappointment that a resident's complaint of this nature had to be referred to the Township Committee as the relevant council departments should deal with such matters efficiently and adequately. It was requested that a synopsis of events be provided to councillors and clarification be sought regarding if residents and councillors concerns had been included in the application or if they could be put forward to the Planning Inspectorate.

Resolved:

1. That Environmental Management and Legal Services provide members with a synopsis of events, including details of delays.
2. That Environmental Management respond in writing to Mr T. Mayne's concerns.
3. That Environmental Management seek to regularly chase the progress of the application status with the Planning Inspectorate and provide updates on the application status to Members and residents.
4. That Environmental Management confirm if details of residents' concerns were submitted in the bridleway application to the Planning Inspectorate and to confirm if there was still opportunity to submit concerns.
5. That the Chair of the Rochdale South Township Committee write to the Planning Inspectorate expressing disappointment at the timeline and request to see a resolution as soon as possible.

16 ADVICE IN ROCHDALE SOUTH TOWNSHIP

The Township Committee received a presentation of the Public Health Development Manager which summarised a new model to deliver advice in the Rochdale Borough from 1 October 2023. Following a Welfare Advice Review in June 2022, it was concluded that there was a growing need for high quality welfare advice to residents in local communities.

The report included a detailed literature and statistical review, interviews with key welfare advice partners, consultation with residents and a cost benefit analysis of different models of delivery.

Members were informed that the new township-based advice model would be a hybrid system that enabled residents to find solutions to problems around benefits, indebtedness, employment, health and wellbeing, housing, and equality, amongst a range of other issues that had become more prevalent since the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis.

The proposed model had a budgeted cost of £250,000 which had been secured from Public Health core funding. The hybrid offering meant that some aspects of the service would be delivered 'in-house', some would be delivered by an external specialist service, and some would be delivered by the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector.

Citizens Advice would act as the system leader and training would be offered to ensure that advisors were appropriately skilled with up-to-date knowledge to provide quality assurance. Citizens Advice would also continue their borough-wide phone and digital service Adviceline.

Current resources such as the Council Customer Services Team and Living Well's Community Champions would also be better utilised to offer more advice support in the Rochdale South Township; this would be provided both remotely (over the phone and the internet) and face-to-face in accessible community facilities.

The Public Health Development Manager noted that there were currently seven members of staff employed with experience in helping residents to resolve welfare advice issues and signpost them to other support services. There would be at least two new venues in each of the borough's five townships where residents could access face-to-face welfare and other advice.

For Rochdale South Township, the venues would be Number One Riverside and Deeplish Family Hub on Hare Street where slots would be offered to residents on an appointment and drop-in basis. By co-locating the Customer Services Team with partners at Deeplish Family Hub and Number One Riverside - where the Work and Skills Team, Citizens Advice and the Community Champions hosted drop in sessions - it was hoped that a number of 'gateways' would be created and these would be developed further with more partners over the coming months.

Members highlighted the need for well-advertised face-to-face drop in sessions, and raised their concerns in relation to a lack of multi-lingual advisors readily available at face-to-face appointments. Concerns in relation to how the Public Health team would monitor that residents are benefitting from the new model were also raised, as well as the need for more practical support to relieve pressure on residents that are required to complete forms (such as for benefits) accurately. It was also highlighted that such customer facing roles dealing with residents in difficult circumstances can create a very

hard working environment for staff and requested that staff wellbeing and support be given due consideration.

Resolved:

1. That the report and presentation be noted.

17 CASTLETON PROPERTY IMPROVEMENT SCHEME

The Committee considered a report and presentation on the Castleton Property Improvement Scheme of the Directory of Economy. The report sought to receive approval from the Committee that the principle of a Property Improvement Scheme for Castleton Local Centre be developed by Officers for further engagement with members and property owners.

The Committee was informed that the proposal would improve the visual appearance and architectural quality of some commercial properties in the area whilst stimulating greater residential uses within the centre and footfall to improve the vibrancy of the centre. The proposal would present an opportunity to support the ongoing regeneration of Castleton Local Centre as supported through the recently adopted Castleton Station Area Supplementary Planning Document and wider Rail Corridor Regeneration Strategy and Bee Network Scheme.

The Officer advised that the key purpose of the report at this stage was to consult with the Township Committee and seek Members views on the parameters and principles of the scheme.

Members agreed that an improvement and uplift scheme was needed in the Castleton area to kick-start regeneration and provide a boost to the area to compliment the housing in the area as well as support the Rail Corridor Strategy and transport hubs.

Councillor Anstee raised concerns that as well as the Castleton Area there were other wards of the borough which would also benefit from similar schemes and questioned if similar proposals would be introduced elsewhere. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing advised that this scheme was specific to Castleton in relation to its conservation and heritage sites, including the restoration of buildings within the Castleton south conservation area, which was on the Historic England Heritage at Risk Register and that other wards may be considered in future schemes if further funding was secured. The Officer also advised that other shop renovation schemes had already been implemented across the borough in recent years including in Rochdale, Middleton and Heywood and that this proposal also sought to deliver on the recent Township Masterplans.

Members raised concerns that the map of the proposed scheme area as included in the report was not specific enough and required clarification as to what properties/area would be included. It was advised that the map would be amended in line with further consultation with residents and ward members.

Resolved:

1. That the content of the report be noted by the Rochdale South Township Committee.
2. That the principle that a Property Improvement Scheme for Castleton Local Centre be developed by Officers for further engagement with Members and property owners be approved.
3. That the boundaries of any scheme can be extended in line with the ongoing Bee Network scheme to include properties outside the conservation area as shown in the plan in Appendix A.
4. That Officers can be authorised to continue to engage with partners to explore external funding opportunities for the implementation of the scheme.