

**SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
30TH NOVEMBER 2006**

**MINUTES
(18.00 – 20.20)**

PRESENT Councillor Mrs Driver (in the Chair), Councillors Allen, Mrs Franklin, Flynn, Nicholson, Rawson as substitute for Councillor Mrs Holliday, Seacome and Webster

Mrs Kitchin, Mrs Steers and Mrs Sallis

APOLOGIES Councillor Mrs Hall
Councillor Mrs Holliday

RELEVANT DEPUTIES IN ATTENDANCE:

Leader (Councillor Smith)
Cabinet Member Quality of Life (Councillor Mrs Ryder)

67 members of the public

1. INTRODUCTION

Before the start of the meeting the Chair briefly explained the format of the meeting to the public in attendance and the procedure for asking a question to ensure that as many people were heard and responded to as possible.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 16th October 2006 be approved as a correct record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions or petitions had been received.

5. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE

(a) **By Council** – None

(b) **By Cabinet** – None

(c) **By Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee** - None

6. ST PAUL'S ESTATE REGENERATION – NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL ASSESSMENT RESULTS AND RECOMMENDED OPTIONS (Agenda item 6)

In introducing his report, the Assistant Director Built Environment explained that it set out the results of the Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment which had been undertaken independently by an experienced consultancy firm, PPS Ltd, adhering closely to guidance set out by the government. He indicated that the process undertaken had included a physical survey of all properties in the area and a survey of resident and stakeholder views. His report summarised the consultant recommendations for the future of each of four sub groups within the St Paul's estate and outlined a provisional timetable for the regeneration scheme at paragraph 3.1. The Assistant Director Built Environment indicated that this timetable needed to be 'firmed up' over the next few months to produce the phased implementation plan and associated financing plan. He explained that the next stage of the process will be a report to Cabinet on 12th December 2006 based on the recommendations of PPS Ltd, together with any recommendations made by the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee that evening. The Assistant Director Built Environment pointed out that it was inevitable that not all residents will be happy with whichever options are chosen for the sub-areas within the St Paul's estate but officers had listened carefully to the views of residents and other stakeholders and must now take this opportunity to end the uncertainty for residents and proceed to implement the recommendations of the consultant's report.

7. PRESENTATION BY PPS LTD, CONSULTANTS (Agenda item 7)

Mr Adrian Chowns gave a detailed presentation on the St Paul's Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment process covering the following key areas:-

- NRA – a brief overview of the government approved method for assessing neighbourhoods prior to regeneration or renewal.
- Sub area analysis including initial impressions following a 'walkabout' of the main area
- Development of Vision and Objectives – a steering group comprising local residents and key stakeholders was set up and agreed the following vision statement 'We will work together to create a community where people choose to live now and in the future' and a number of objectives that would have to be realised to attain the vision.
- Information gathering - including detailed House Condition survey, face to face household survey and environmental survey.
- Consultation – Residents Steering Group held at various stages of process and drop in sessions for all residents, stakeholders (police, members, community groups) and the wider area.
- Option development, selection and appraisal – for each sub area the final agreed options were assessed against a set of agreed scoring criteria which were financial and non-financial.
- The key findings and recommendations

Mr Chowns explained that NRA is a rational decision making methodology and a planning tool to objectively evaluate alternative courses of action to assist the Local Authority in decision making. It provided a strategic framework/action plan for the way forward but there was no right or wrong answer. It was now up to the council to develop an implementation plan in consultation with residents as soon as possible in order to maintain the momentum of the NRA.

8. MEMBERS AND PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Comments and questions in respect of Crabtree Place (Sub Area B):-

- Councillor Rawson pointed out that there was conflicting information within the report regarding the proposals for Crabtree Place, one section indicated complete demolition and redevelopment whilst in another section the properties to be affected were numbers 2 – 27.

In response Adrian Chowns clarified that there had been an error in the final draft of the NRA report and this sub area should be subject of a transformational redevelopment scheme (demolition and redevelopment of all properties)

- a number of residents were elderly and did not want to move, one lady was blind, another had become ill through worry - why can't they be left alone?

In response Adrian Chowns explained that PPS Ltd had been asked to carry out an independent assessment, there was no personal vendetta against anyone and the results at this stage were not set in stone.

- One owner/occupier in Crabtree Place indicated that his family had lived there since 1928 and had also built up livelihood, why should he move? Why couldn't the empty properties be pulled down and the others be brought up to standard by the council?
- I am a traveller, this is the first place I have ever been welcomed into a community. I've been told I may have to move – please don't make me leave.

Comments and question in respect of Manser, Hudson and part of Hanover Street (Sub Area D)

- Councillor Rawson acknowledged that there were some advantages to forming a cul de sac to both ends of Manser Street and Hudson Street but commented that as one third of the properties were to be demolished to achieve this, this would result in significant change for limited outcomes and a mishmash of new and old properties.

In response Adrian Chowns explained that this number of properties was in the worst case scenario and purely indicative. It was a suggestion of how it could be achieved but could be developed further within the implementation plan.

- Significant adaptations funded by a charity had been undertaken to a property in Hudson Street which was now proposed for demolition. Could the council provide assurances that these adaptations would feature in any future accommodation whether temporary or permanent. This was not just about houses, but peoples' homes and roots.

In sympathising with the situation, the Chair explained that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was not a decision making body and therefore could not give these assurances.

- The houses in Hudson Street were solid, why demolish some of them to make way for redevelopment – what a waste of money. One resident had lived there 16 years and did not want to move, will she go back to a house within the area?

- What percentage of the redevelopment would be sold off to owner/occupiers. Most residents were not in a position to buy but still took pride in their homes. A community had been built up over the years and it was not about bricks and mortar but the people inside the houses. The residents had been waiting for over 12 months not knowing what was going on with their lives, didn't the council care?

In response, the Chair indicated that this level of detail could not be given at this stage but the council did care and that was why the Committee had come out to the community, to listen to residents concerns and make recommendations to Cabinet to be considered as part of the decision-making and implementation planning process.

Comments and questions on the regeneration proposals in general

- Councillor Webster commented that there was a distinct lack of children's facilities currently in the St Paul's area and provision for this must be included in any future brief in respect of the implementation plan.

In response Adrian Chowns agreed that with the exception of Pittville Park there was a lack of play areas in the immediate area. However community based facilities in consultation with residents had been suggested as part of design consideration for the next stage.

- Councillor Webster commented that initially when surveyed, 80% of residents had indicated that they wanted to stay in St Paul's following the regeneration, based on the proposals within the NRA report could this still be achieved?

In response, Adrian Chowns could see no reason why not as there were a number of voids not effected by demolition within the proposals. The redevelopment of Crabtree Place could result in different types of property and some residents may not wish to move back. However the NRA report did not provide this level of detail as the ultimate decision and implementation plan was now in the hands of the council.

- Councillor Seacome commented that the sense of community was very strong and it was important to keep people within St Paul's where possible whilst the works were being undertaken so that school provision was maintained.
- The Chair indicated that she had not appreciated the strong community spirit within St Paul's. She asked that if houses had to be demolished they be replaced by houses and bungalows and not just flats.
- The situation had been dragging on for over 12 months and the residents were getting nowhere – demolish the whole lot!
- Please do not divide this community, we have been working with the council over the past twelve months and our opinions have not been taken into account. My concerns are for older people and the children. Education is accessible and the children can currently walk or take a short bus ride to school. Why have the council neglected the estate and left it so long. Why demolish, why not repair – St Paul's is one of the best communities in Cheltenham.

- Why did residents have to find out from the Echo the total number of properties to be demolished? when officers at the area office were asked for this information residents were told that it was not available.

In response the Assistant Director Built Environment acknowledged that there had been difficulties getting the final report into the public domain because there had been very little time between the Leader's undertaking that the 153 page report which at that stage was being finalised by the consultants was to be considered by the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the meeting itself. However copies of the report had been made available at the area offices and the community house as soon as available.

- Councillor Flynn commented that it was a very difficult decision to make particularly when considered in the context of the long term perspective of St Paul's and Cheltenham as a whole. She asked that if residents had to move out then inconvenience and stress be kept to a minimum and that they did not suffer financially as a result of any action by the council.
- Diane Hayes, the Chair of St Paul's residents group asked whether the council still intended the revised overall tenure balance of St Pauls to be no more than 30% affordable rented housing, with the rest being sold off as outlined in the Cabinet report dated 20th December 2005.

In response, the Chair indicated that this report had been written during the previous administration and the strategy may now have changed. However, in her opinion all those residents that want to go back should go back.

9. RESPONSE FROM THE CHAIR OF ST PAULS RESIDENTS GROUP AND OTHER REPRESENTATIVES (Agenda item 9)

Diane Hayes, Chair of St Paul's residents Group provided a formal response to the regeneration proposals as outlined in Appendix A attached.

In response Adrian Chowns, explained that the views of stakeholders and residents in the vicinity of Sub Area B and Sub Area D had also been taken into consideration and the options had then been subject of both financial appraisal and socio-environmental appraisal based on methodology prescribed by the Government which had resulted in the final scoring.

The Chair invited Mr Chris Meehan to provide a response, however he declined indicating that he could not add anything to the response of Diane Hayes. He welcomed the great opportunity to exercise local democracy.

10. RESPONSE FROM WARD COUNCILLORS FOR ST PAULS (Agenda item 10)

As one of the Ward Councillors for St Pauls Councillor McKinlay acknowledged that it was a contentious issue but welcomed the fact that the report had now been produced. He commented that under the previous administration the intention had always been for the residents of St Paul's to have a vote on what happens, although no reference had been

made to this within the report. He was concerned about this because the council needed the residents to be on board with the regeneration proposals otherwise a significant amount of investment could potentially be wasted.

Councillor McKinlay asked for further clarification on the precise number of houses to be demolished as it was unclear from the report. He was also concerned about the disturbance to the people not directly affected by demolition but still living in the immediate area. In general he supported the proposals but indicated that some provision should be made for the residents to have their say.

11. RESPONSE FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader thanked the Chair of Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee for agreeing to engage in a detailed examination of the consultants' proposals before Cabinet makes its final decisions on 12th December 2006. He indicated that he felt it important for the proposals to be given a full public airing and provide residents and stakeholders in St Paul's the opportunity to make comments through the scrutiny process.

The Leader referred to the earlier part of the meeting when residents had appeared to support the suggestion made by a resident to demolish the whole of St Pauls and start again. He queried this response as he thought the message previously received from residents was that they did not support this option. It was clarified following a show of hands by residents that only one person present wanted complete demolition.

The Leader thanked Diane Hayes, the Chair of St Pauls Residents Group for her part in the process, indicating that despite difficult conversations, dialogue had remained open between the council and the residents. It was important to continue this dialogue during the next stage of the process.

The Leader gave his personal guarantee that he would do everything in his power to support any residents who are affected by the plan and that they will be assessed in order to meet their individual needs. He indicated that the Cabinet was aware that lives and families were at stake and wanted to work closely with residents through any changes. As far as was possible residents will be kept within the community during the redevelopment and the Leader gave his personal commitment that within his powers every resident will be given the opportunity to live in St Paul's in five years time.

The Leader explained that following discussions with the Cabinet Member Quality of Life, both were keen to improve the housing and the local environment in St Paul's and provide the best possible options for the residents including traffic calming and community facilities. It was hoped that social housing would remain with Cheltenham Borough Homes which was a view shared by tenants, although this could be difficult both legally and financially depending in part on the results of the housing inspection scheduled for January 2007.

The Leader indicated that the implementation plan will provide the detail and consultation will be carried out throughout the process to ensure that residents are happy with their temporary accommodation and what they go back to. He anticipated that by Easter the outline implementation plan including timetables would be drawn up for Cabinet approval, however the majority of works was unlikely to start until 2008.

12. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

Councillor Webster indicated that the proposed scheme provided a mechanism for meeting the decent homes standard in a way that will make it more sustainable. However he felt that detail was currently lacking in respect of Crabtree Place, Hudson and Manser Street. The design which was the next stage of the process was crucial, as if the council get it wrong there will be repercussions in future.

Councillor Rawson explained that he had been a Ward Councillor for St Pauls for 12 years and it was heart-rending that the residents had had to go through this 12 month period of uncertainty. He felt that Aldridge Close did not need to be included in the NRA but in general supported the proposals providing the intention was for tenants to return to the area if they so wished.

Councillor Allen commented that the report provided guidance only but even if there was no demolition there would be disturbance whatever the outcome and the residents needed to be supported whether they stayed or moved out temporarily. The proposals for Crabtree Place needed to be clarified and further consultation was required with residents and stakeholders.

Hazel Kitchin commented that there was a recurrent theme in the discussion so far relating to the length of time, and asked whether any of the future stages could be speeded up. In response the Leader, indicated that he would do everything he could to resolve the issue as quickly as possible. The detail now had to be worked up and consultation with residents over the next 3 months was crucial.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked the residents for their help and co-operation during the meeting. It was important to remember that for whatever course of action the council were dealing with people and not just houses. However, the area was in need of regeneration and expertise should be drawn upon to assess the needs of residents particularly the elderly and disabled during the transitional period. A Community Centre was also an essential part of any future implementation plan.

RESOLVED that the Committee:-

- 1) welcomes the results of the Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment as a basis for progressing the regeneration initiative as speedily as possible, consistent with proper resident consultation and financial planning, and subject to clarification of any doubt about which properties are recommended for demolition in Crabtree Place, Hudson Street and Manser Street.**
- 2) welcomes the personal commitment from the Leader of the Council that he will ensure within his powers that any St Paul's residents needing to be temporarily re-housed as a consequence of the regeneration programme will be offered accommodation which is suitable for their needs (including caring, employment and education needs) and will if they so wish be offered a permanent home on the St Paul's estate within five years.**
- 3) recommends to Cabinet that:-**
 - i) the commitments of the Leader listed in (2) above be endorsed by the Cabinet;**
 - ii) the regeneration scheme should be progressed without delay and uncertainty to the residents (tenants and owners);**
 - iii) dialogue with all residents of the estate should be enhanced throughout the programme;**

- iv) sufficient council-owned homes for rent, managed by Cheltenham Borough Homes be re-provided to meet the needs of the existing residents;**
- v) environmental and community resource challenges be addressed as an integral part of the programme**
- vi) houses and bungalows rather than just flats should be built**

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Wednesday 10th January 2007

**Councillor Mrs B Driver
Chair**

Appendix A

Formal Response from the Chair of St Paul's Residents Group

Good evening Madame Chair, Committee and residents. 'Salubritas et Eruditio' Cheltenham's own crest. It means Health and Education, yet you still want to disrupt the lives of the elderly, the disabled and the children of this community.

In Cheltenham Borough Council's own words the strategy of the council is to reduce inequalities in communities and develop a sense of community yet in the St Paul's NRA, the real sense and meaning of community is abundantly clear for everyone who lives and visits our homes.

There are 312 houses affected in the NRA but 261 of these are homes with cherished memories which are irreplaceable, families, longstanding friend who over decades have formed bonds which go to a level that bricks and mortar can't replace.

The community of St Paul's appreciate that a level of transformational modernisation is required but is there not another way to compromise, that does not mean the upset, hurt and loss of precious memories that demolition would entail.

In appreciation to PPS Ltd for the survey and work they done, but with great respect the community have doubts over the figures they've attained. In short, we believe that the survey is greatly flawed. Firstly when the survey was first decided upon, the street representatives had a meeting with several Councillors and CBH staff, where we were shown and asked how the questionnaire should be worded. We gave our suggestions and they were ignored. Secondly when the questionnaire was introduced around the St Paul's NRA, the surveyor refused to let the residents fill in the forms themselves, this gives rise to a serious doubt on whether the surveyors actually filled in what the residents said or whether they filled them in to what the council wanted the surveys to say. Thirdly, when CBH delivered their drop-in sessions at Frances Close Hall most of the residents in Sub Area B – Crabtree Place voted 4 (high level improvement with change to physical layout and environment. In Sub area D - Manser, Hudson and part of Hanover Street the majority vote was for option 4 but option 6 (mixture of redevelopment and high level improvements to properties and the environment) might be considered if residents were able to give their opinions of demolition. Yet PPS Ltd has decided that 17-35 and 34-52 Hudson Street, 29 -51 and 34-56 Manser Street need to be demolished. There is no evidence that the community can see why all these homes should be demolished.

In conclusion Madam Chair, Committee and represented Councillors we the community of St Paul's recommend that the PPS Ltd report be quashed and that in return a new and fair survey be commissioned. We the community of St Paul's respectfully request that this Committee and the Cabinet consider the health and rights of the residents and to listen to our views and to consider the heartache and fear that all this indecisiveness has put on the lives of all the residents, and that you consider the residents charter, and to give us a Xmas and life that we are all able to enjoy without the worry and fear that all this has been put upon us for the last 12 months.