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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 6 NOVEMBER 2013

(19.15 - 21.15)

PRESENT: Councillors Russell Makin (in the Chair), Stan Anderson, Samantha George, Dennis Pearce, Ray Tindle, Peter Southgate, Ian Munn and Miles Windsor

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Maurice Groves and David Dean

Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration), Ashley Heller (Project Manager – Rediscover Mitcham), James McGinlay (Head of Sustainable Communities) and Stella Akintan

1 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 1)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor David Dean and Councillor John Sargent

3 MITCHAM TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION SCHEME (2) (Agenda Item 3)

The Chair took statements from the councillors who had called the decision in.

Councillor Maurice Groves said he had a number of concerns including the effect on the rest of the retail offering. Also when bringing buses to one place it could cause problems for people with physical and visual impairments in navigating their way round the buses. There is also concern for the safety of children as this is supposed to be a public space so children are likely to be running around. More buses in the area this increases the likelihood of accidents.

Councillor Dean said that he agrees with all the plans for the regeneration of Mitcham except for the bus lane. The area has been in decline for a long time and there was previously a bus lane in place, it made no difference so there is no logic in putting it back in. Where is the proof of the additional six thousand shoppers? Buses do not always bring in people.

The Chair invited members of the public to speak for up to three minutes both for and against the call-in.

Barbara Mansfield read out a statement on behalf of Alan Hutchings. The consultation has been mediocre. There are good aspects to the scheme including landscaping and improvements to shop fronts. However in an open letter to Councillor Andrew Judge, 91 businesses rejected the bus lane. There were misleading questions in the consultation. To say that six thousand new people will

come to area as a result of the bus lane is flawed. Only half of this number will be new arrivals. The consultation needs to be referred back to the Cabinet member for re-consideration.

John Mansfield said the bus lane will be very narrow. If a bus breaks down it will need to mount the pavement. The bus lane proposal was very cheaply done and not agreed by Transport for London.

Tony Burton said he is in agreement that we need to revitalise Mitcham. However he does not agree that shifting bus stops will bring about the economic revival that is needed. There is no clear evidence that this approach will work. The consultation was flawed as people could have responded more than once. There are better options for the area including; making it easier to get across the Road, engaging businesses, more support for the market. Overall the bus lane is an expensive damaging hunch.

Vijay Patel informed the Panel that he had been in business in the area for twenty eight years. Businesses are currently struggling, the recession has lead to a very difficult situation. The plans for Mitcham will make a real change. It will be detrimental if we say no to the bus route.

Councillor Judge was invited to justify his decision

The decision was taken as a result of extensive consultation and is supported by the Mitcham ward councillors and the Street Management Advisory Committee. It has been the most consulted upon scheme in recent history. There were 1445 responses to the first consultation. 995 to the second consultation, this is a total of 2420 responses. In the first consultation 76% agreed with the bus street. In the second 66% agreed. Multiple responses to the consultation can be verified through emails and phone numbers. It was found that at least one person has a signature on both. The proposals are supported by officers. No businesses have brought an objection and in a recent consultation three businesses came forward in support.

In regards to the safety of children, this is a junction with heavy traffic, children will have to be aware of the dangers and there is no reason why they will be in any more danger. It is a public space in a town centre and needs a degree of caution. It is not a children's playground. This scheme is supported by Transport for London. There is a lack of footfall in Mitcham, which cannot support the current businesses and services in the area.

Councillor Judge said that the figure of six thousand extra people coming into Mitcham was taken from Transport for London. There will also be considerable improvements to the public realm to encourage people to shop there.

Councillor George said based on information provided there may have been some double counting on the consultation.

Councillor Judge said the information he provided related to responses not number of respondents.

Councillor Windsor asked if the expected six thousand new shoppers were a daily or a weekly figure? What proportion of the Street Management Advisory Committee were in favour of the Mitcham Regeneration scheme?

Councillor Judge said six thousand people will get on and off buses every day. We do not know how many will shop. Street Advisory Management Committee passed the scheme with the chair's casting vote.

The Chair then invited the Panel to ask questions of the council officers.

Councillor Munn asked what was done to hear the resident's views after the second consultation?

Ashley Heller Project Manager said that there were two phases; the first in November 2012 there were 1445 responses and 76% of businesses agreed.; The second took place in June there were 995 responses and 66% supported the bus lane. Workshops were also held. It was an extensive, inclusive and lengthy consultation process and can be relied upon as a sound piece of evidence.

Councillor George asked if there was a problem with repetitive emails from the same person as some residents felt that this was an issue.

The Director for Environment and Regeneration said the figures are linked to the formal response on Merton website. Twenty five thousand surveys were distributed across the borough. The votes were placed on a single spread sheet which could register duplication. The electronic responses were in proportion to the paper responses. The information was input by the Future Merton Team any suspicious responses were noted. Only two examples were found.

Councillor Windsor asked if it would be feasible to stagger the development of the scheme, so more evidence can be gathered about whether the bus lane will make a difference to the area?

The Director for Environment and Regeneration said that if the scheme is staggered we would lose Outer London Funding and also not sure what additional evidence can be provided.

Councillor Windsor said we need to look at the assumption that there will be an additional six thousand shoppers and this will drive footfall into the shops.

The Director for Environment and Regeneration said the six thousand figure is evidence based and not unreasonable to assume if we can bring pedestrians closer to shops that retail businesses will benefit. The plans will also make Mitcham more vibrant and attractive to shoppers other than those on the current buses.

Councillor Tindle asked if there will be monitoring to see if the changes are working and also that the artists impression drawings of the site had been misleading.

Ashley Heller said there will be monitoring. There will be survey of pedestrian movement paid for by Transport for London. There will also be an interim and after survey.

The Chair asked for final thoughts on the proposals

Councillor Judge said that he cannot see any reasons to delay the proposals, there should be no half measures.

Councillor Windsor said he was concerned that there had been so much assumption. The six thousand number is an assumption. The consultation had enough questions raised to worry about it. We could incur additional costs if we need to remove the bus lane. We need to ensure that that the proposals are right for local people.

Councillor Munn said the consultation has shown a spread of responses and high support for the proposals.

Councillor Pearce said that he found it hard to believe that businesses would object to this opportunity as it would benefit them and provide value for money. If this provides half the benefit that we are hoping for then it will be worthwhile.

Councillor Southgate said he was satisfied that the consultation was sound, there is a degree of risk in regards to the six thousand new shoppers, however this risk is proportional to the number of people coming to shop based on the balance of probability. Overall he is satisfied that it is a sound decision.

Councillor Anderson said that we all want the regeneration of Mitcham. The buses will contribute to the regeneration and we have the funding to do it.

Councillor George said we are claiming that moving bus stops will bring in shoppers in other areas we are pedestrianising areas for the same reason. It is the quality of businesses that will help to regenerate Mitcham. The bus lane is emotive and is seen as tearing the heart out of Mitcham. There has been no real response to this concern.

The Chair moved a vote to determine if the decision should be referred back to the cabinet member

The following councillors voted in favour:

Councillor George
Councillor Tindle
Councillor Windsor

The following councillors voted against the decision being referred back to the cabinet member

Councillor Anderson
Councillor Munn
Councillor Pearce
Councillor Southgate

RESOLVED

That the decision of the cabinet member is supported

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