

Planning & Economic Development Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Minutes

Commencing 6pm

11 February 2003

Bourne Hill

Salisbury

Present

Councillor P D Edge (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs S M Thorpe (Vice Chairman)
Councillor K A Cardy
Councillor P M Clegg (substitute for I R Tomes)
Councillor N S Gallop
Councillor Mrs J M Greville
Councillor Ms S C Mallory
Councillor Mrs M A Peach

Apologies

Councillor J Coundley
Councillor J B Hooper
Councillor Mrs C A Spencer

In Attendance

H Collar (SDC)
D Crook (SDC)
G Gould (SDC)

SWEP Invitees

Mr Tom Clay
Mr Peter Le Count
Mr Simon Richards
Mr Alan Taylor

Public/Observers

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Public Questions/Statements

150. There were no public questions or statements.

Minutes

151. The minutes of the meetings of 14 and 22 January 2003 were **agreed** as being a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Declarations of Interest

152. Councillor Mrs Thorpe declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 5 (Review of the Effectiveness of the South Wiltshire Economic Partnership (SWEP)) for the fact that she was a member of the SWEP Board. Councillor Mrs Thorpe remained in the room while the matter was being considered but did not take part in the interviewing or the discussion that followed.

Review of the Effectiveness of the South West Economic Partnership (SWEP) in Achieving its Objectives

153. The Chairman welcomed the SWEP Board members to the meeting and accepted apologies tendered on the behalf of Lucy Herklots, Chairman of the Churchfields Business Action Group.

154. Panel Members then questioned the SWEP Board members on a variety of matters relating to the Partnership. A note of the questions asked and the responses provided by the Board members is attached (see Annex A). The key points to emerge from the dialogue were **agreed** as being as follows:-

- Closer and more effective working arrangements between the District Council's Economic Development, Tourism and Marketing (EDT&M) Unit and Development Services and Forward Planning and Transportation Units is required in order to ensure that the 'economic perspective' is taken into account when planning decisions are made and, most importantly, when planning proposals/the local plan are being developed. The inclusion of SWEP in this working arrangement being a prerequisite and the matter to be considered as a possible subject for scrutiny in the immediate future.
- Benefit could be gained from the District Council becoming more pro-active in taking the lead and taking forward the 'visions' of the various bodies, organisations and agencies involved (or having an effect on) economic development and the prosperity of Salisbury.
- The District Council, in liaison with SWEP and others could consider adopting measures to attract suitable businesses of 1-15 employees (recognised as being key 'economic drivers') to city centre locations in Salisbury.
- Benefit could be gained from the District Council investigating the feasibility of developing the Churchfields site as a business estate (possibly by amending existing planning conditions), encouraging relocation, possibly to out of town sites (or a single out of town site), of the industrial-type businesses (including cardealers) currently situated there as well as the Council's refuse vehicle depot and municipal 'bring' site.
- The need for the Council to act to encourage the provision of adequate infrastructure (power and broadband connectivity) in the city centre.
- That a request be made to the Cabinet to reconsider the 'priority rating' given to 'economic development' for the forthcoming financial year and that consideration be given to raising this 'rating'.

155. In discussing the matter of staff turnover at Salisbury District Council, the Chairman informed the SWEP board members that the Council was a 'victim of its own success'; providing excellent staff training and opportunities for promotion and was successful in recruiting staff who were well motivated, enthusiastic and 'fired with ambition'. As a result, Salisbury District Council staff were better placed than many to take advantage of opportunities for widening their experience or for promotion and this sometimes meant their seeking (and often gaining) employment with other Councils.

Panel Members: K A Cardy, J Coundley, P D Edge, N S Gallop, Mrs J M Greville, J B Hooper, S J Howarth, Mrs M M A Peach, Ms S C Mallory, Mrs C A Spencer, Mrs S M Thorpe, I R Tomes

156. David Crook, Director of Policy, Salisbury District Council, confirmed the above statement and informed Panel and SWEP Board members that the Council's staff turnover rate was below average. In addition, Graham Gould, Head of Economic Development, Tourism and Marketing Unit (EDT&M), Salisbury District Council, pointed out that staff changes in a small teams (such as EDT&M) had the potential to have a greater impact than staff changes in larger teams.

Preliminary findings of Survey of SWEP Public Sector Members and Survey of Major Local Employers

157. Following brief presentations by Graham Gould, Head of EDT&M Unit, Members considered the survey of the SWEP Public Sector Members (seeking their views on the effectiveness of the Partnership's new way of working with an Executive Board and Forum) together with the survey of public sector members of SWEP (seeking their views about the benefits to be gained from the existence of SWEP).

158. The following points were **agreed** :-

- i/ SWEP needs additional support from Salisbury District Council;
- ii/ SWEP and Salisbury District Council need to think more beyond the city centre;
- iii/ a mechanism needs to be introduced to ensure that Salisbury District Council's Development Services (Planning) Unit consults SWEP (as formal consultees) when considering relevant planning applications;
- iv/ SWEP comments (as formal consultees) on planning applications (as suggested at (iii), above) should be reported in full, and not just in precis form in planning reports;
- v/ Consideration should be given to introducing a mechanism by which Area Committees could receive regular updates from SWEP as to the business situation (and most importantly, the planning requirements) in their areas.

Panel Forward Work Programme 2003/04

159. Members considered the list of possible scrutiny subjects circulated, at the request of the Chairman, at the meeting (see Annex B, attached).

160. Members **agreed** that the Panel's forward work programme for 2003/04 would be agreed at the next Panel meeting and that the programme would be subject to confirmation by the members of Panel post 1 May 2003 elections.

Dates of Next Meetings

161. The dates of the next two meetings were **agreed** :-

- Tuesday 11 March 2003, commencing 1800hrs
- Tuesday 8 April 2003, commencing 1800hrs

The meeting closed at 1955hrs.

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PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

MEETING OF 11 FEBRUARY 2003

REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SOUTH WEST ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP (SWEP)

QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION WITH EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OF THE SWEP BOARD

Q1. It has been said that awareness of SWEP is low and, for this fact, SWEP is not truly representative of the business community. [PE]

A1. SWEP has over 450 members (of which 150 are core members) and is as representative of the business community in South Wiltshire as it is possible to be in the circumstances. Members knowing of any Councillors not aware of SWEP are asked to ensure that that Councillor contact a member of the SWEP Board who will be happy to provide information on SWEP. [AT]

Q2. The SWEP budget for 2003/04 had been reduced. Why was this ? [KC]

A2. It had been decided that the seminars and grants offered by SWEP to SMEs would be discontinued for the 2003/04 financial year. Similar seminars are being provided by the Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses and, owing to their small size (£500 being the maximum that any SME could apply for), take up of the grants had been low. The funding that SWEP received for providing both seminars and grants had, therefore, being removed from the SWEP budget. Should demand for seminars or grants be identified then consideration would be given to their re-introduction. [AT]

Q3. What additional support could SDC give to SWEP ? [MP]

A3. SDC could :-

- Act more strategically, setting out an economic vision which would provide the context for SWEP's work. [AT]
- Take action to co-ordinate the various 'visions' being produced by many organisations, bodies and government agencies and broker one common, over-arching 'vision'. [AT]
- Take a more 'joined-up' approach, for example, when tackling matters such as the Brunel Link, taking not only planning considerations into account, but economic and other factors as well. [AT]
- Develop closer and more effective working arrangements between the District Council's Economic Development, Tourism and Marketing (EDT&M) Unit and Development Services and Forward Planning and Transportation Units to ensure that the 'economic perspective' is taken into account when planning decisions are made, and more importantly, when planning proposals/the local plan are being developed. Ensure the inclusion of SWEP in the working arrangement.

- Adopt measures to reduce staff turnover, particularly in small teams such as Economic Development, Tourism and Marketing (a team upon which SWEP depends in order to achieve its objectives) where the loss of only one staff member can have a severe impact. [AT]
- Foster direct communication between the Wiltshire Economic Partnership and the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) with SWEP. The reason for this being because SWEP is currently dependent on SDC for passing on information about regional or county level economic initiatives.

Q4. What opportunity, as a formal consultee, did SWEP have to comment on the local plan ? [SM]

A4. None. [SR]

Q5. Is it the aim of SWEP to increase membership (i.e. business representation) numbers ?

A5. It is an ongoing aim of SWEP to increase membership and this year will see an increase in the advertising and marketing of SWEP to businesses. It is worth noting, however, that SWEP meetings are vibrant and well attended events and that SWEP has credibility (in terms of standing and reputation) within the business community. The influence of SWEP extends beyond its membership and it is frequently the case that new members are recruited by existing members. [AT]

It is also worth noting that small business attendance at meetings is often irregular and issue (in terms of direct relevance) dependent. This is because small businesses, must, necessarily, be selective as to which external events they can afford (in personnel and time terms) to attend. [SR]

Q6. What line does SWEP take on small businesses in rural areas ? [MP]

A6. Small businesses in rural areas are recognised as being 'economic drivers' and are to be encouraged. A raft of assistance is available to small businesses and business 'start-ups'. SWEP, however, has concerns regarding, and is looking into, the lack of assistance available for businesses (small and medium sized) with growth potential and for businesses with marketing needs. [AT]

When considering location, businesses take many factors into consideration and some of these factors are directly related to a business's size. For example, it is sometimes the case that business start-ups can benefit from being co-located with other small to medium sized businesses. Such co-location allows facilitation of communication between business at various stages of development, the provision of learning opportunities, cross fertilisation of ideas and, if required, the sharing of support (including secretarial and administrative) facilities. Such developments, however, are not always appropriate for rural areas. In Salisbury, South Western Enterprise have, for some time, been searching for a site in which to locate a collection of start-up businesses without success. [AT]

Large businesses (for example, James Hay Pensions), on the other hand are, increasingly, requiring town centre (or 'within the ringroad') locations. This is for staff recruitment and retention reasons; staff (especially 'women-returners' upon whom the South West is becoming increasingly reliant to address labour shortage problems) citing the need for easy (preferably on foot) and immediate access to shops and services. As businesses grow and employ more staff this requirement becomes increasingly relevant in business relocation decision-making terms. [AT]

It appears, increasingly, to be the case that city centre premises vacated by shops/businesses are being re-classed for housing use. The effect of this is to further push retail/business development out of town (or to other towns such as Amesbury) and to reduce the number and increase the price of city centre premises available for new and growing shops/businesses. [AT]

The above is of concern for the effect that it is having on businesses with 1-15 employees. Such businesses have been identified as being one of the fastest growing sectors in the M3 corridor and are key drivers for improving the economic prosperity of an area. Salisbury is not succeeding in attracting businesses of 1-15 employees - many of which could, suitably, be located above shops or in premises vacated by shops. [AT]

SWEP is committed to helping to attract businesses to areas such as Chilmark and Tisbury (and not just to Salisbury) and sees promotion of the 'A303 corridor' and the 'business research triangle' as being a fundamental tool in this respect. [PLC]

As far as development within Salisbury is concerned, it is SWEP's view that Salisbury District Council (including through its planning policies) should take the lead in actively encouraging the evolution of Churchfields from industrial to business, with industrial units (especially garages) being encouraged to relocate out of town (where long vehicle movements are unlikely to cause the problems they currently do in the city centre). Freeing Churchfields for business/office use would, in addition, address the problem of the shortage of office/business accommodation currently available within the ringroad and its redevelopment would allow for the installation of adequate infrastructure (such as electricity and broadband facilities); infrastructure which is currently of insufficient capacity and causing problems in certain areas of the city. [AT]

The difficulties of persuading businesses to leave Churchfields and the costs to those businesses of moving should not be underestimated and the promotion of Churchfields for office use should not be used to justify inaction on the problems of access for Churchfields which are addressed by the Brunel Link. SWEP remains in favour of the Brunel Link. [TC]

In considering the redevelopment of Churchfields for office/business use, the relocation of the Council's depot and municipal waste 'bring' site should be considered. [SR]

In addition, it would be key, in any such redevelopment, for the Council to take the lead and ensure that a co-ordinated approach to the development be adopted. SWEP can provide the 'vision' and the link to business(es). [AT]

Q7. What do the interviewees consider to be the benefits of SWEP and why do they give their time to SWEP ? [PE]

A7. SWEP provides an access route to a large part of the business community, a part that has no 'axe to grind' and whose aim, as far as SWEP is concerned, is to work towards improving the operating environment of all businesses (or potential businesses) in the District. SWEP is held in high regard and, for example, other Councils request briefings as to how SWEP operates and its relationship with the Council. On a personal level, involvement with SWEP is because the way in which Salisbury develops is important; I chose to live here (and could equally as well choose to leave) and I hope to be able to facilitate communication between relevant parties (political and non-political) for the benefit of Salisbury. [AT]

SWEP is not simply a 'talking shop', it 'makes a difference'. It is a true business to business and business to Council (via the EDT &M Unit) partnership. Personal involvement is because of my belief in SWEP and a desire to ensure that Salisbury remains a thriving community; offering opportunities to youngsters and encouraging them to stay (or return) and contribute to the wealth (in the widest sense) of the area. [SR]

SWEP provides a 'meeting place' for the exchange of views between businesses and between the Council and businesses. Personal involvement is for all the reasons given above.

Relocation to Salisbury was by choice and my wish is for Salisbury to remain vibrant (not only from a business perspective) and for Salisbury not to become a commuter/dormitory location. My involvement with SWEP is to safeguard Salisbury. [PLC]

Q8. What has SWEP achieved this financial year that is the most important ?

A8. The production and dissemination of the 'vision statement' which involved taking into account the views, aspirations and concerns of a wide range of individuals, businesses and other organisations/agencies. [AT]

The engagement of more businesses and the development of new areas of influence for the furtherance of SWEPs aims and objectives [[SR]

The production of the 'vision statement' which is as important for what it *does not* contain - in recognition of what Salisbury *does not want* in terms of development. [TC]

The increase in business (and other) engagement with, and awareness of, SWEP as a direct result of the production of the 'vision statement'. [PLC]

Q9. What is/are the disappointment(s) of the financial year ?

A9. SWEP is always seeking to increase and widen its membership (and thereby its ability to be able to present a fair and representative view) and more could always

be achieved in this aspect. In addition, more progress towards overcoming the tendency of small businesses to respond pessimistically when consulted on their performance in, and the conditions extant, in a particular year, could have been hoped for. [AT]

Increased and more regular representation at SWEP meetings by larger businesses to ensure that their views (and not primarily the views of SMEs) are taken into account could have been hoped for. [SR]

The lack of take up of the seminars and grants was a disappointment (and is the reason for their having been removed from the SWEP forward work programme). [TC]

Q10. After experiencing a year of working towards achieving the aims and objectives as set out in the 'vision statement' what progress has been made in achieving these aims and objectives and what priorities have been identified for the year ahead ? [NG]

A10. Progress in awareness raising has been exceptional; over 60 businesses have become involved with SWEP as a result of the production of the 'vision statement' and SWEP meetings are as vibrant and lively as they have ever been. For the year ahead, a number of issues have arisen from the meetings and SWEP is currently engaged with the Council's EDT & M Unit in progressing these issues. [AT]

The 'vision statement' was finalised in May 2002. However, notwithstanding the progress made in raising the profile of SWEP, owing to staffing shortages/changes in the EDT & M Unit since the publication of the 'vision statement', less progress than might have been expected has been made in progressing stated aims and objectives. Future work includes a drive to encourage firms offering professional services to locate and/or remain in Salisbury. This to be achieved, in part, by SWEP highlighting the need for the provision of adequate infrastructure (for example, power and broadband connectivity) in the city centre. [PLC]

Q11. What other points (if any) would SWEP wish to make ? [PE]

A11. SWEP noticed that, in prioritising the Council's activities for the municipal year ahead, the Cabinet had lowered the priority rating given to 'economic development'. This was of great concern to SWEP and SWEP would have been pleased to have been invited to speak at the meeting at which the decision had been made. SWEP would welcome any opportunity to raise the priority rating of 'economic development' in the Council agenda. [AT]