



Minutes of the Annual Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Arms Everytyn House, Quay Road, Blyth NE24 2AS on Tuesday 28th May 2013 at 6.30pm.

Present:

Members of the Public: 15

Councillors: A Cartie, B W Elliott, K Ellis, K Nisbet, M Parker, R Parker, J R Potts, O Potts, L Rickerby, D Rutter and G Thompson.

In Attendance:

Town Clerk (Democratic Services)	S E Rickitt
Town Clerk (Corporate Services)	S Noddings
Administration Clerk:	A McCabe
Events Co-ordinator:	P Taylor
Committee Clerk:	L Forsyth

Also Present :

Tim Bailey- Xsite Architecture.

Meeting

The Mayor welcomed all the members of public in attendance. This was followed by an outline of the meeting and its format as a vehicle in order for the public to express their ideas and hopes for Blyth. The Mayor explained that meetings such as this will assist the Council in the creation of short, medium and long term plans for the Town.

Tim Bailey from Xsite Architecture provided a presentation. The following issues were discussed and highlighted.

'Blythscape' development at Commissioners Quay

An outline was provided regarding the future development by ARCH on the Commissioners Quay. The proposed office space will provide a purpose built environment designed to attract primarily interest from the energy sector but also digital media sector.

It was outlined that the key considerations when planning for this development were the public (with regards to the landscaping and creation of an open environment) and providing a space that is attractive to business in developing sectors.

Future development in Blyth from regional examples

Tim Bailey went on to discuss examples which he believed could provide ideas for future development in Blyth. Citing Barnard Castle as an example, Tim described the struggles that Barnard Castle was facing including employment and wider demographical issues and how the Town had sought to address its problems.

One such example was 'The Box', an installation which as well as providing information and local deals, also acted as a talking point and encouraged debate within the town. Its strategic placement within a visible part of the Market Place meant that the installation also continued its use and acted as an office for a local business until it was moved to become a recording studio for a local School.

An emphasis was placed on playing to the strengths of the respective towns. Within Barnard Castle there was a burgeoning arts and crafts community. In order to promote this, a development called 'Nest' was created. This provided an accessible and vibrant environment for artists to both display and develop their arts and crafts. The provision of Wi-Fi and wider facilities also allowed for 3 businesses to set up base within the development.

A shop front grant scheme was also outlined. This involved funding support being provided in order to encourage traditional shop fronts in order to improve the aesthetics of the town. This was also linked to the creation of a Retailers Guild.

The development of Witham Hall in Barnard Castle was also discussed. This hall represented a historical focal point yet had remained unused or under occupied. It and the Nest's development with their current standing was used to demonstrate an exemplary microcosm for the groundswell generated via small projects, with this being a key pull factor in promoting other projects and interest within the Town.

Tim Bailey provided the example of the currently regeneration project in Redcar, which he suggested was comparable to Blyth. A summary was provided including issues with the length of the main shopping street causing issues for traders. A situation which eventually led to such decline, that the McDonalds restaurant left. Future development and the relocation and concentration of business within a certain area have created the beginning of a resurgence within the Town Centre.

Questions from the Audience included:

Q The first question concerned whether there had been any “sign-ups” for the office space at Commissioners Quay given the abundance of office space in the Town?

A At present there are no sign ups however marketing studies have been conducted and have found that demand and business sector desire does exist.

Q A question was raised concerning difficulties in comparing Barnard Castle to Blyth.

A The choice of Barnard Castle was just an example used to demonstrate that ‘small wins’ generated larger projects which could be tied into Blyth with a larger project naturally representing the Blyth Market Place.

Q A question was then posed regarding whether the development on Commissioners Quay was to consist of offices or workshops?

A It was stated that the development would consist of ‘offices’ with confusion perhaps being drawn from his use of the term ‘workspaces’ which represents a modern term used for office facilities.

Q Concerns were raised regarding the consultation process for the development. It was stated that it appeared that in fact little consideration had been given to public concerns raised at the consultation meeting.

A It was outlined that from the initial plans quite a lot had changed. Concerns such as linking the building to current buildings on the Quayside were considered however another key consideration was the future and it was his belief that this new building with considerations for balance and urban design would set the pace and precedent for future development along Commissioners Quay.

It was also acknowledged that contemporary design was often controversial, but that this design was chosen in order to be attractive to young enterprise play part of the businesses image making process.

Q An enquiry was made regarding the financial management of the site and whether the County Council would be providing financial support.

A A business plan has been created and will be enacted with the buildings operator. The plan will consist of a ‘start-up mode’ in order to account for any difficulties which may be experienced. He stated that he had

confidence in the running operator and that his confidence also stemmed from the shared space that will create traction for the incoming businesses.

Q Concerns were raised regarding the architecture spoiling the flow and representing an eye-sore for the Quay.

A The macrocosm of St Paul's Cathedral was used to address concerns. It was stated that this building has been designed for the long term and it is hoped will play a crucial role in defining and what Blyth is and where it hopes to be in the future.

Q A question was posed regarding the source of funding for the development.

A It was stated that the funding was sourced through the European Regional Development Fund.

Q Further information was sought regarding the experiences of setting up a Retailers guild as was outlined having been set up in Barnard Castle.

A It was outlined that the key findings and requirements were all related to the power of communication in order to come together for the interests of the wider Town.

Q An enquiry was made as to what the total budget for the development of the site was?

A £6 million had been designated for the build and the running costs had been accounted for but were not included within that sum.

Q Concerns were raised regarding the creation of an Enterprise Zone beside a conservation area.

A Blyth Town Council's Town Clerk (Democratic Services) responded that this was stemmed from a designation from Whitehall and that conservation should not be seen as blocking economic growth.

The Mayor thanked Tim Bailey for his presentation and declared he had learned a lot from the presentation. The Meeting now moved to a Question Time session.

Q A question was posed regarding the moving of Public Question Time in Full Council Meetings.

A The Town Clerk (Democratic Services) responded that it was his belief that the current position of 'Public Question Time' was working well and that it informed the meeting which took place following. He also stated that if the 'Public Question Time' is situated within the meeting it provides some protection from defamation amongst other strong practical reasons.

Q A question was asked concerning whose responsibility it was to get people back into the Marketplace?

A Councillor Parker outlined that while the responsibility for the Market Place lies with the County Council that Blyth Town Council had made significant contributions. The Town Clerk (Corporate Services) noted that the Town Council had been involved in providing new awnings, a new website for Traders, stickers, tables and community stall support.

Q A concern was expressed regarding the cleanliness of the public areas such as the Market Place and the public toilets within Blyth.

A Councillor Kath Nisbet stated that regarding the Market Place there are rules concerning the Traders and this is to be continually enforced. Regarding the public toilets it was stated that this is a Northumberland County Council responsibility. A member of the public suggested that potential involvement of the probation service in the cleaning process. Stephen Rickitt stated that he would investigate this and contact the County Council.

Q The final question was posed and it concerned potential money from Section 106 Agreements.

A The Town Clerk (Democratic Services) is to investigate with a view to reporting back to the Council Meeting and the Planning and Development Committee.

The Mayor then provided some closing words outlining the need to present and promote Blyth in a positive manner. The Mayor also thanked Tim Bailey for his presentation and the public for their contributions. Cllr Parker expressed the need for continued involvement from the public in order to best plan ahead and best present and meet the needs of all in Blyth.

MEETING CLOSED AT 8.05 PM

Liam Forsyth

Committee Clerk

Blyth Town Council

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