

Place Overview and scrutiny Committee
17:00 13th November 2024
Council Chamber, Hove Town Hall

Present: Cllrs Evans (Chair), Cattell (Deputy chair), Fowler, Sheard, Sykes, Thomson, Winder. Mark Strong (CVS), Michale Creedy (OPC)

17a) Substitutions: Cllr Baghoth for Cllr Hewitt, Cllr Meadows for Cllr Lyons, Cllr Earthy for Cllr Fishleigh, Michael Creedy for Mary Davies (Older Peoples' Council)

17b) Declarations of interests: Mark Strong: Contacted by one of the residents groups in a professional capacity asking for planning advice but did not respond.

17c) Exclusion of the press and public:

Chair: Amongst the papers circulated to elected members were confidential (Part 2) papers from the Cabinet Meeting. Any discussion of these papers will need to be in confidential session and will need to exclude the press & public from these discussions. I am keen that we conduct as much of this meeting as possible in public session. When we come to questioning Cabinet members and officers, I would therefore request that members reserve any questions about confidential papers until there are no more questions that can be taken in public session. We will move into a Part 2 confidential session towards the end of the meeting. All elected members are reminded not to raise matters contained in the Part 2 documentation during the public meeting.

18) Chairs Communications. The Chair gave the following communication:

I'd like to thank everyone for coming to this special meeting of Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

This meeting has been called to give Overview & Scrutiny members the opportunity to consider and comment on plans for the disposal of Patcham Court Farm. This report considers options for the future use of Patcham Court Farm and proposes the sale of a long leasehold interest in the site to Royal Mail for the development of a new Delivery Office. The report that we're considering today, and which was published online last week, is due to be agreed by Cabinet tomorrow afternoon.

Minutes and any agreed recommendations of this Overview & Scrutiny meeting will be shared with Cabinet Members ahead of their meeting, so any comments or recommendations that Overview & Scrutiny members make today will go to inform the Cabinet decision.

19) PATCHAM COURT FARM

19.1 Cllr Jacob Taylor (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and City Regeneration) presented the report to the committee. Max Woodford (Assistant Director, City Development & Regeneration), Jessica Hamilton (Estates Manager), and Sam Smith (Head of Regeneration) were also in attendance.

- 19.2 Michael Creedy (OPC) asked a question on the collection of parcels. Cllr Taylor responded that Royal Mail have confirmed that a city centre site will be identified for parcel collection. The Patcham site will not be used for this purpose.
- 19.3 Cllr Sykes asked questions about the protection of the site in the lease and its long length, the protection of the environment and the aquifer, and transport. Cllr Taylor said that the details of protection would be dealt with in the terms of lease. Regarding the lease, Cllr Taylor note that companies buying a leasehold and investing their capital want protection. Jessica Hamilton added that there are controls in the lease, so that if the leaseholder wants to make significant change in the future, these will need to be negotiated with the council.
- 19.4 Cllr Meadows raised the issues of the length of the lease; the protection of the aquifer; the protective membrane only lasting for 50 years; the site being considered too small for park and ride; the retention of Royal Mail jobs on the site; housing not being a realistic option because of the site's designation the Local Plan; and the potential use of the Hove Royal Mail site for social housing, she did not believe the viability of either site for social housing, the 'first refusal' for the Hove site not meaning that the council will get it, and what protections there are to stop Royal Mail selling or sub-letting the land in the future. Cllr Taylor responded that planning restrictions were in place to protect the site; and that Southern Water did not object to the application in terms of its impact on the aquifer. On job losses he told members that neither of Royal Mail's current sites are suited to their needs and that there is a strong likelihood that they will move their distribution centre out of the city if they cannot move to Patcham. Contrary to Cllr Meadow's assertion, the Hove Royal Mail site is viable in terms of social housing. The council does not have to sign this agreement until they were happy with the Hove site deal. On the lease length, Cllr Taylor told members that a long lease needs to be considered as an alternative to sale of the freehold. A long lease gives Royal Mail the security they require, but allows the council more control of the site than an outright sale. Max Woodford added that water protection was considered by the planning committee. The site is contaminated now and these contaminants are going into the water; the proposed use of the site will improve this.
- 19.5 The Chair asked if there was an answer to the 50-year life span of the membrane. Max Woodford replied that it would need to be looked at by the leaseholder in the course of time.
- 19.6 Mark Strong asked a question about the length of the lease, the park & ride option, and what could happen to the site in the future. Cllr Taylor responded that the length of the lease was not unusual for major developments, and that it provides security for the leaseholder as well as a degree of control for the freeholder. Cllr Cattell noted that some of the protections given in the planning consent include tight restrictions on the future use of the site. Cllr Muten (Cabinet Member for Transport, Parking & Public Realm) clarified that a report on Park & Ride options will be presented to Cabinet in January 2025.
- 19.7 Cllr Sheard stated that, although he is eager to see all opportunities taken to develop housing in the city, it is evident that the Patcham Court Farm site cannot be used for this purpose. Given the benefits of leasing to Royal Mail, not least the positive

environmental impacts of them moving to fully electric fleet, this is too good an opportunity to turn down.

- 19.8 Cllr Winder asked a question about protections in the lease to stop parts of the site being used for non-essential car-parking. Cllr Evans also sought assurance around the timeframes for development of the site and for the transfer of the Hove site. Cllr Taylor responded that it was a complex issue, but that there are already robust protections in terms of planning conditions and that other issues would be addressed in the negotiation of the lease.
- 19.9 Cllr Fowler said that she was disappointed that housing was not an option, and that she was pleased that Southern Water did not object. She wanted to know why housing was not a suitable option and if this would have affected the aquifer. Cllr Taylor said that housing was considered, but was not a viable option given the high costs associated with decontamination and building on the site.
- 19.10 Michael Creedy asked a question about bus services to reduce traffic into the site from workers as the nearest bus was a ten minute walk away. Max Woodford responded that an additional bus service to the site, running in the morning, will be piloted for one year, using Section 106 funding. Whether this continues in the longer term will depend on use of the service.

The Committee went into Part 2 confidential session.

The Committee resumed Part 1 session

- 19.11 Cllr Meadows stated that she was still concerned about sub-letting. Cllr Taylor said that in theory Royal Mail could sub-let to another part of their company, but the site would have to remain a distribution centre unless planning change was agreed.
- 19.2 RESOLVED** – that the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee notes the Cabinet report on the disposal of Patcham Court Farm.

