Growth Committee
12 November 2015

Information Item: State of the Borough debate - Growth

Report by Director of Place

Purpose
The annual State of the Borough debate was held in full Council on 15th September 2015. The purpose of this report is to summarise the key issues and points raised and respond to the comments made.

Recommendations of the portfolio holders for Regeneration and Growth & Identity
That the Committee notes:
1. the themes and issues arising from the annual State of the Borough debate as set out in Annex 3.
2. the activities being undertaken which includes the themes and issues raised at the debate as set out in paragraph 9-22, in the section on ‘Action Areas’ and in Annex 4.

Key Points
A. This report summarises the themes discussed and matters arising as part of the State of the Borough Debate that occurred on 15th September 2015.

B. The debate was focused on ‘Growth’ and drew a range of participants including elected members and members of the public, stimulated much discussion and resulted in a wide range of issues being raised.

C. A number of key themes were identified covering a range of issues. These have been reviewed and assessed.

D. The Council is proactively undertaking a range of activities that respond directly to the issues raised. This activity is being undertaken as part of existing work-streams.

Context
1. This report summaries the key findings and recommendations arising from the annual State of the Borough debate held on 15th September 2015. The debate formed the main part of the full Council meeting, the theme of which was ‘Growth’. A briefing paper on this topic was provided for the night (attached at Annex 1).
2. Invitations to attend were sent to a range of organisations with an interest in development in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames (RBK), including residents' organisations, civic organisations and developers.

3. The debate opened with a presentation by Stewart Murray, Assistant Director of Planning at the Greater London Authority (GLA).

4. Representatives of interested organisations and members of the public who wished to contribute to the debate were then invited by the Mayor to come forward to speak. A range of representatives and individuals participated (Annex 2).

5. Thereafter, the debate was opened up to Members of the Council and included the Leader of the Council; the Leader of the Opposition; the Chair of the Growth Committee; and the Opposition Spokesperson for Regeneration. In addition a number of other members of Council participated (Annex 2).

6. At the conclusion of the debate, the Leader of the Council responded to the issues raised and confirmed that a report of the proceedings would be referred to the next meeting of the Growth Committee to consider issues arising from the debate. This report reflects that commitment.

**Themes Raised in Debate**

7. A wide range of issues were raised through the debate. Following the meeting these have been collated and to reduce duplication have been categorised under a number of themes (see Annex 3).

8. The key themes raised may be summarised as the:-
   - Public sector and its response to austerity
   - Relationship of the borough to growth
   - Nature and process of planning, determining and delivering growth
   - Importance of affordable housing
   - Significance of investment, job creation and skills development
   - Council taking a lead in development.

**Response to Themes**

9. A detailed assessment of the issues raised through the key themes has been undertaken (Annex 4). This responds to the collated issues and aligns them with work and activity currently being undertaken, and identifies any significant gaps.

**Public sector and its response to austerity**

10. The public sector, including the Royal Borough has been, and will continue to be significantly affected by the current financial climate and the effects of austerity. The Council, along with its partners is undertaking a range of measures to address these impacts through its response to the devolution agenda, its own Outcome Based Budgeting exercise (Our Kingston Policy
programme), and a number of other initiatives, such as the Estate Regeneration programme.

11. Critically, growth generates investment, new jobs and homes across the borough, which could generate significant amounts of additional revenue and investment being made to existing and new infrastructure (physical, social and green). This of course has to be balanced against the environmental and social impact of growth.

12. The Kingston Futures programme reflects the RBK ambition and identifies key areas of regeneration activity. These are actively being pursued to support investment and economic growth in the borough.

**Relationship of the borough to growth**

13. RBK has had more than a passing acquaintance with growth over the past 30 years, with the opening of the relief road, Bentalls Centre, John Lewis, and Charter Quay, to name but four. Over the past 10 years or so this has slowed, partly by choice, partly by the economic landscape, and partly because of the cyclic nature of growth. It is inescapable that growth is happening again, and the Council has the choice to participate, or not. The Council has chosen to respond proactively to the opportunity presented by growth through the Kingston Futures programme, and a number of other emerging initiatives, such as Business rate retention. Greater priority is also being given to the production of the Council’s statutory development framework: a new Local Plan, Kingston Opportunity Area Plan, and an integrated Kingston Economic Growth & Development Strategy. This approach is proactive and seeks to manage, shape and influence the location, level, quality and benefits secured by growth for the borough.

**Nature and process of planning for and delivering growth**

14. The Council cannot manage and shape growth by itself. And, any approach to growth must be set within a regional and sub-regional context, whether it be the London Proposition to devolution or the London Plan.

15. Engagement and consultation with stakeholders and partners forms an important part of any process that seeks to manage and balance growth. This will vary in type and extent depending on the strategy being developed.

16. The determination of planning applications occur through a recognised and robust process, which takes account of local issues. RBK has introduced a range of mechanisms to ensure that the quality of development and the needs of local areas are fully considered in the determination process. These include area and site based development briefs, pre-submission consultation, external independent design review, pre-development control meetings, community forums etc.
**Importance of affordable housing**

17. The delivery of affordable housing is a key issue for RBK. Securing and delivering affordable housing remains complex, whether through the planning system or through private and public enterprise. RBK is undertaking a range of initiatives to increase the supply and delivery of affordable housing within the borough. These range from exploring the setting up of a development company, the Estate Regeneration programme, and through encouragement and consideration of appropriate planning applications.

**Significance of investment, job creation and skills development**

18. Kingston Futures is proactively involved in the planning, management and facilitation of timely investment and regeneration across the borough. In taking forward future strategies that will deliver growth, there are clear priorities to maximise infrastructure investment around key areas which both have significant benefits in their own right but also support wider economic growth and benefits for the borough i.e. improved transport connections and public realm enhancements.

19. The Council is committed to ensuring that a balanced approach is followed with social and physical infrastructure requirements being identified, funded and programmed to meet the needs of the community and service providers.

20. RBK engages with a wide range of stakeholders/ investors to plan, secure and maximise the benefits associated with infrastructure investment. These include TfL, the GLA, utility companies etc.

21. RBK is seeking to optimise economic growth and public/ private sector investment across the borough. Delivery of these objectives is will be through a planned and co-ordinated Economic Growth and Development Strategy. More immediately, RBK has established mechanisms and a number of measures to maximise job creation and/or opportunities to support skill development.

**Council taking a lead in development**

22. RBK are aware of a range of ways in which services and activity can been innovatively delivered. RBK continues to be open minded and will explore every available opportunity to add value and enhance the delivery of RBK ambitions and service requirements.
## Action Areas

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| **Key messages**                           | Three key messages can be distilled:  
(i) Growth is happening  
(ii) We have a choice  
(iii) Tangible and significant economic, social and environmental (public realm) benefits can accrue if managed sensibly and in a balanced way |
| **Public sector and its response to austerity** | • Our Kingston Policy programme  
• Housing Estate Regeneration programme  
• Maximising external funding sources |
| **Relationship of the borough to growth** | • Kingston Futures programme  
• Business rate retention  
• Kingston Opportunity Area Plan  
• Kingston Economic Growth & Development Strategy |
| **Nature and process of planning for and delivering growth** | • Engagement and consultation with stakeholders and partners  
• Area and site based development briefs  
• Planning application pre-submission consultation  
• Pre-development control meetings  
• Community forums  
• New publicity about how the planning system works to go out with public consultations on planning applications  
• Member involvement in pre-application discussions  
• More and better quality member training on planning matters |
| **Importance of affordable housing**       | • Explore the setting up of a development company  
• Housing Estate Regeneration  
• Small site development for affordable Housing  
• Delivery of Starter Homes under the Housing and Planning Bill 2015  
• Review of the affordable Housing policy in the new Borough-wide Local Plan |
| **Significance of investment, job creation and skills development** | • Ensure a balanced approach to social and physical infrastructure  
• Optimise economic growth |
- Deliver public/private sector investment across the borough
- Maximise job creation and/or opportunities to support skill development

Council taking a lead in development

- Be open minded to explore every available opportunity to add value and enhance the delivery of Council ambitions and services

Timescale

23. The range of actively identified in response to the issues raised covers a wide period. Activity is both immediate (engaging with developers to secure investment/deliver jobs/skill development) and also over a period of years (Local Plan development).

24. Where appropriate timely engagement will be undertaken formally through established committees, community forums and boards. As well as informally through discussion and liaison with key stakeholders and partners.

Resource Implications

25. A wide variety of the activities identified in responding to issues raised have resource implications. The activity identified reflects both existing and planned areas of work. Financial resource relating to a range of these activities is finite and workload has to be prioritised and more innovative ways of delivering services and outcomes will have to be found with partners and other external bodies.

26. Resource requirements to deliver longer-term activities (i.e. Kingston Local Plan, the Kingston Opportunity Area Plan, the Kingston Futures programme) are constantly under review due to their complexity and likelihood that issues emerge during their formulation and development that will have resource implications.

Legal Implications

27. The activities proposed are wide ranging. Legal advice and support will be needed as a number of these matters are taken forward.

28. The vast majority of the activities (current and proposed) reflect areas commonly dealt with by legal colleagues and hence should not give rise to significant legal issues beyond those already known/anticipated.

29. However as a precaution, regular engagement and liaison will occur with legal colleagues across the range of activity identified. At this time, it is not envisaged that the measures proposed will cause any significant unforeseen issues.

Risk Assessment
30. RBK adopts a proactive yet proportionate approach to the identification and management of risks across its activities. A number of the approaches identified are activity managed to ensure any possible risks are identified, monitored and mitigated. These are managed and reported through RBK’s established governance procedures.

**Equalities Impact Assessment**

31. A number of the current and proposed areas of activity have been the subject of an equalities impact assessment or will require one to be completed. Screening assessments are and will continue to be undertaken to identify those areas/activities where an equalities impact assessment will be required.

32. One important area for an assessment to be completed with be during the completion of the Council’s statutory planning documents. At a variety of points this will be required to be undertaken as part of the Sustainability Appraisal process to ensure that the Local Plan/Kingston Opportunity Area Plan policies do not disadvantage any groups or communities. The Sustainability Appraisal will need to be undertaken at key Plan-making stages to test the impact of policy options testing.

**Network Implications**

33. None

**Environmental Implications**

34. The range of activity undertaken by the RBK across the key theme will present a range of environmental implications to the borough. These will be considered in detailed as part of all activity with the standard approach adopted seeking to protect, enhance and increase environmental assets such as nature habitat, water quality, flood protection, air/noise quality and open space.

**Background papers: None other than those referred to in this report**

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