

Full Council - Wednesday, 19 September 2018

Written question from Cllr Whitehouse to the Leader, Isle of Wight Council

If he will make a statement on his vision for the future regeneration of the Newport Harbour district and for attracting investment and jobs to the Medina Valley; whether that vision will include the redevelopment of the County Hall site; and if he will identify the steps so far taken to deliver his objectives and the timelines he anticipates for future progress?

Response

I'd like to thank Cllr Whitehouse for his question and providing the opportunity for me to update full council on progress with this key part of our regeneration ambitions.

While the proposals for regeneration in Newport Harbour and attracting jobs and investment to the Medina Valley are sometimes seen as important opportunities in their own right, they both support a wider vision for further enhancing the Medina Valley's role as an economic powerhouse for the Island and across the wider Solent region.

The complementary development this year of a Place Plan for Newport, in conjunction with Newport Parish council and Newport Business Association –*reinforcing our commitment to working in partnership*, importantly addresses the need to also reinforce the town's role as the county town and ensure regeneration of the harbour is undertaken hand in glove with improvements to the town centre.

The evidence behind the priorities identified for the Place Plan confirmed Newport's significance as the civic, transport and commercial hub providing most of our employment as well retail and cultural facilities. Protecting and enhancing this is a key part of the shared vision for the area in the future set out in "Shaping Newport" plan.

Work has begun on its 15 priority actions identified through the effective engagement of over 3000 residents and businesses in the town.

This is a great example of the ongoing talking and listening to our people and businesses underpinning the draft regeneration strategy – still open for comments for a few more weeks until the 12th October.

I'm able to inform council that a crucial milestone in the development of Newport Harbour was reached last week, with the selection of a high calibre team to develop the detailed masterplan for the harbour. We are currently in the "standstill" period following a highly competitive bidding exercise during which we received proposals from some of the UK's leading architect and development teams.

This will see the acceleration of a process begun when we took up office last year when harbour users, local businesses and community stakeholders shared their vision for what the harbour could be. All of this previous work will enable the new "Newport Harbour side" plan team to get off to a flying start and bring forward proposals for the harbour that will also help inform the development of the new Island Plan and create the de-risked environment within which development on the ground can take place.

My vision is for the Harbour is to provide an enhanced civic and commercial focus for the Isle of Wight with an arc of opportunity stretching up the Western bank of the Medina from the Quayside through the college and hospital sites connecting with a much needed new function for the former Camp Hill prison site.

What we do in Newport Harbour will act as a microcosm of what we want to achieve for the island as a whole –“To be an inspiring place in which to grow up live and visit”

Cabinet agreed last week the first of the crucial road improvements, at St Marys roundabout and St Georges Way, designed to help support the development of this vision. There are more improvements to come over the next 2 years. The next stage of reviewing of our Island wide infrastructure needs will include a feasibility study into the potential contribution a new bridge across the Medina might make in improving our traffic flow and unlocking other development.

We will always also need to keep to the forefront of our minds the Medina Valleys other existing and developing role as a centre for our most special wildlife, cycling and eco-tourism.

We will continue to work with all partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors to realise this ambition and we want to keep all options on the table to ensure the best solutions are realised without any pre-conceived constraints. The existing county hall site and the supporting car parks will therefore form part of the master planning exercise for the harbour.

The masterplan is due to be completed in April 2019 and in parallel we will also be identifying the best delivery mechanism for what the projects it proposes remembering our future approach is about retaining ownership of assets , generating revenue and delivering quality development the people of Newport and the island as a whole will be proud of.

It is likely the development of the harbour will undertaken in phases and we are aiming to see the 1st phase getting underway before the end of 2019. This type of major regeneration takes time and I will expect developments over a 10 year timeline to realise all its elements.

I want to also update council on our continued efforts to secure the future of marine manufacturing the island by providing modern bespoke facilities for those companies needing to relocate on the island and enable more growth in that sector. Following the acquisition of some key sites on the Eastern Medina and the granting of planning permission for a Marine Employment zone at Medina Yard, the council is working closely with all those involved to ensure new facilities are made available within the timescales required.

This will involve the council acting alone or in partnership with others to develop the right premises for rent to companies and put the Medina Valley on the map, regionally, nationally and internationally as an attractive hub for marine manufacturing to complement the Medina's existing recognition as a centre of excellence in Composite manufacturing highlighted in last week's coverage by Forbes magazine.

Finally I just want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the drive, commitment and single minded purpose of Councillor Whittle in moving forward our whole regeneration agenda. While some might question his style I know the Islands regeneration future is safe in his hands and he has the full support of his cabinet colleagues and me in turning our vision into reality