

**CULTURE, TOURISM AND
ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW &
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item 27

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject: *Scoping report for Ad Hoc Panel proposals*
Date of Meeting: **October 7th 2009**
Report of: *Director of Culture and Enterprise*
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Wards Affected: All

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 The reports sets out information on three proposals for Ad Hoc Panel reviews that the Culture, Tourism and Enterprise Scrutiny Committee may wish to consider building into its work programme, namely: the use of empty commercial premises, the future of New England House as a digital media hub and cultural services for children and young people.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Committee consider taking forward one of these proposals or seek/develop alternatives.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- 3.1 A proposal to look at the use of empty commercial premises was proposed by Cllr Pete West as follows:

Empty properties spoil town centres, damaging their economic and social value. Vibrant community uses can benefit existing shops, as well as the wider town centre, through increased footfall, bringing life back to the high street and making better use of resources overall.

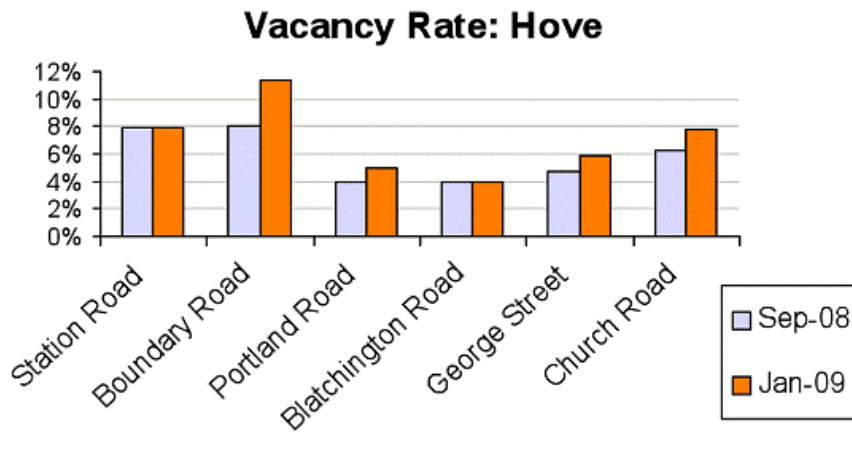
I understand that the Local Government Association has successfully campaigned to allow local authorities more powers in this respect, and that this has now been backed by national government (<http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageId=1804893>).

I am therefore requesting that the Culture, Tourism & Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee undertake a scrutiny into how the council can best use its powers and resources to work with community groups and the business community to bring empty commercial property back into use across the city.

3.1.1 Brighton and Hove has seen the closure of some city centre commercial retail premises as a result of the recession, but not to the same degree as elsewhere in the region or nationally.

National vacancy rates stood at 12% in summer 2009 (Experian data), with major UK cities such as Liverpool Leeds and Derby suffering from over 20% vacancy rates.

Below are the most recent figures for Brighton and Hove.



All the above streets have a vacancy rate below the current UK average.

In Central Brighton the latest rate for vacancies stands at 4.7% (Oct 2008), which is less than the 5.75% recorded March 2008.

- 3.1.2 Whilst the availability of space is an issue for many of our community and third sector groups, the kind of short term usage with unpredictable notice periods, is not wholly conducive to sustainability for those groups. Additionally, the costs and insurances involved in preparing premises for use by the public is often prohibitive, the space in the Co-op building on London Road is currently charged out at £300 per week for example. Any new powers conferred on the local authority in terms of planning and licensing; do not preclude the need for the necessary insurances and health and safety measures. The use of Circus St in the most recent Brighton Festival in May is another example where the cost of preparing the empty commercial space for use by the public and the measures that had to be taken would deter most groups.
- 3.1.3 Where there have been empty shopfront premises in both Brighton and in Hove centre, the Local Authority Business Growth Initiative Recession Relief programme project to put large scale artworks in those shopfronts has been used to great effect.
- 3.1.4 As a local authority, the powers of intervention over commercial premises are limited. Arguably, the resources of the local authority are best used in the direct support of groups, either community groups or third sector, looking for premises, sourcing funding and capacity building. A recent report to Cabinet as a result of

a Notice of Motion from the Green Group outlines a number of recent successes in this area and is attached at Appendix One.

3.1.5 In summary, the impact of a review following this line of enquiry may not have the impact in Brighton and Hove given vacancy rates and rental rates that it might have in another location.

3.2 A proposal to look at the future of New England House as a digital media centre was proposed by Cllr Pete West on behalf of the St Peter's ward Councillors as follows:

As I am sure you are aware New England House serves as a vital incubator for small start up enterprises particularly but not exclusively those in the creative industries which make such a vital contribution to the local economy. Occupants are particularly appreciative of the flexible space, low rents and of being part of a vibrant and enterprising community.

There has been much uncertainty over the future of the building recently particularly in light of the aspiration of St James investment to acquire and demolish the building in order to make way for a Tesco's megastore. We understand that these proposals have now been abandoned.

This seems an ideal opportunity for the council to take a fresh look at the future of the building which while much loved is in desperate need of refurbishment. There have also been a series of burglaries recently which have had a devastating impact on those individuals and businesses affected.

So I would like to request on behalf of the St Peters & North Laine ward councillors that The Culture, Tourism & Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee undertake a scrutiny into the future of the building. This scrutiny could be tasked with exploring the options that are available to address the current problems whilst bringing the building into full occupation and securing its long term future.

3.2.1 The proposal to look in detail at the potential future for New England House and to develop an options analysis is one that has been discussed in a number of places within and outside of the authority in recent weeks and months.

3.2.2 Wired Sussex, a networking organisation of digital media organisations have led some of the discussion with members, both informally and formally at a previous Scrutiny Meeting of this committee earlier this year for example.

3.2.3 Since the scrutiny proposal was put forward, the Council's senior management team has mandated a group of officers to develop a feasibility study and options analysis into the future of the building in partnership with the University of Sussex who also have a particular interest in the facility and Wired Sussex. That work is going forward currently.

3.2.4 As part of the forthcoming round of recommendations for the Local Authority Business Growth Initiative funding that is projected to be available for 2009/10,

there is a proposal to fund a portion of this feasibility work on New England House to the sum of £20,000. This proposal will be going in a report to full Cabinet in October this year.

- 3.2.5 In summary, there is currently activity in motion and a high profile focus on the task of taking forward the development of a vision for New England House. An Ad Hoc panel would initiate a parallel piece of work with the same objectives and involving the same officers and external partners. The committee may wish to do this, or to ask for regular reports on the work that is already in place.
- 3.3 A proposal to establish an Ad Hoc Panel into the range and availability, strengths and gaps in terms of cultural provision for children and young people was discussed briefly at the last Scrutiny Committee.
 - 3.3.1 The local authority provides a wide range of service for children and young people both directly such as the programme offered by the Brighton and Hove Music Trust, and indirectly by supporting and funding external organisations such as Same Sky or the Brighton Dome and Festival.
 - 3.3.2 In recent years, the local authority has not been successful in two major government awards that were made available to boost cultural services for children and young people; Creative Partnerships and Find Your Talent. In both cases, Brighton and Hove made strong partnership bids but in both cases was not successful due to the indices of deprivation being higher in the locations awarded the funding; Hastings for example.
 - 3.3.3 Brighton and Hove has an Arts Strategy for Children and young People; Express which was developed by a cross directorate team of officers with external partners. This was developed two years ago, and it has not been easy to raise funding to deliver on all of its ambitions.
 - 3.3.4 The successful Brighton and Hove Arts Commission led project the Children's Festival is due to take place next in April 2010. At that time, the City will also be playing host to a conference on children's festivals and launching a national network of children's festivals that the City is leading on the development of. This might be an ideal opportunity to launch the recommendations of an Ad Hoc Panel undertaking an enquiry into this area of provision.
 - 3.3.5 In summary, it may be timely to re-visit this strategy and to look again at provision across the city with a view to making recommendations on the deployment of existing resources, on where there is good practice and where there are gaps in provision and on future direction. If the panel decide to go ahead they will need to liaise with Children and Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CYPOSC).

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 There has been consultation in the preparation of this report with senior officers and the Chair of Scrutiny.

5 FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications resulting from the recommendations of the report itself, however, there may be financial implications resulting from the recommendations of any Ad Hoc Panel that is established.

Finance Officer consulted: James Hengeveld Date 30 September 2009

5.2 Legal Implications:

There are no legal implications resulting from the recommendations of the report itself, however, there may be legal implications resulting from the recommendations of any Ad Hoc Panel that is established.

Lawyer consulted: Bob Bruce Date: 30 September 2009

5.3 Equalities Implications:

There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report, however, particularly in the case of an Ad Hoc Panel that examines cultural provision for children and young people, the equalities implications would be a driving force for the direction of the enquiry.

5.4 Sustainability Implications:

There are no direct sustainability implications arising from this report. The sustainability implications of any one of the three potential Ad Hoc Panels would be developed throughout the process of the panel's enquiry.

5.5 Crime & Disorder Implications:

There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from this report. Each of the potential three Ad Hoc Panels would be likely to have a direct and positive impact in terms of crime and disorder implications. The proposals to look at empty commercial premises and the proposal to look at New England House have both been initiated partially from a concern in terms of crime and disorder. An Ad Hoc Panel looking at cultural services for children and young people might also choose to focus or make recommendations around provision for young people at risk of taking part in criminal activity or at risk of exclusion.

5.6 Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

The risk and opportunity management implications are covered in the body of the report under each proposal.

5.7 Corporate / Citywide Implications:

All three Ad Hoc Panels proposed would have citywide implications either in terms of the economy of the city or the population.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendix One: **Notice of Motion from Council, 16 July 2009
– Making the Most of Wasted Spaces**

**Cabinet Report, 17th September 2009
– Wasted Spaces – Response to Notice of Motion from Council
16 July 2009**