

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 7th November, 2019

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Joe Baker (Chair), Councillor Debbie Chance (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Salman Akbar, Michael Chalk, Peter Fleming, Andrew Fry, Nyear Nazir, Yvonne Smith and Jennifer Wheeler

Also Present:

Councillor David Thain (Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management)
Reverend Robin Baker (Oasis Christian Centre)
Mr Jordan Cooke (Your Ideas Youth and Community Project)
Mr Ray Groves (RYCE)
Ms Maureen Hayden (What's Your Point)
Mr Tom Rossiter (Redditch Boxing Academy)
Ms Liz Williams (Fighting for Survival Group)

Officers:

Matthew Austin, Lyndsey Berry, Chris Forrester, Sue Hanley, Ostap Paparega, Guy Revans and Judith Willis and Richard Woodward

Senior Democratic Service Officer:

J Bayley

48. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION (COMMUNITY HUB AND RAILWAY QUARTER) - TO FOLLOW

The Head of the North Worcestershire Economic Development Service presented a report in respect of the regeneration of Redditch town centre. During the presentation of this item the following matters were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- The report captured the outcomes of a master planning exercise and the key points of a business case for a public sector community hub. The reports produced by the consultants Dragongate and BDP had been provided in appendices to the report for Members' consideration.

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Chair

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- BDP had focused on a number of site options that might be appropriate and financially viable.
- The documents provided indicative reviews and high level appraisals in order to enable an understanding of the nature and scale of the opportunities available for the regeneration of the town centre.
- The viability of establishing a community hub as a one-stop-shop had been assessed and there had been three key objectives to this review; to deliver a better, user focused public service, provide business efficiencies and to make better use of public land.
- The Council had held conversations with a number of partners in the public sector, including the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Worcestershire County Council and representatives of the NHS trust.
- The initial feedback that had been received from partners about the potential to work together to introduce a public sector hub had been very encouraging.
- The government had announced that Redditch would be eligible to bid for up to £25 million in funding from the Towns Fund.
- The prospectus for the Towns Fund had been published after the report before Members. This prospectus clarified that the Council would need to prepare an Investment Plan to access funding from the Towns Fund.
- The Council would undertake consultation with the public, in accordance with the requirements of the Towns Fund, in order to establish what residents felt the funding should be allocated to.

Following the presentation of the report Members discussed a number of areas in detail:

- The work that had been undertaken in respect of this matter since the One Public Estate report was considered by Members in March 2018 and the reasons why time was needed to progress with the project. The committee was informed that the process was progressing well and at a speed in line with standard practice.
- The options appraisal that had been undertaken by the consultants and why those particular options had been considered. Officers explained that both officers and the consultants were required to consider all viable options in line with professional standards.
- The State of the Area debates that had been undertaken and whether all wards had been consulted. Officers advised that there had been a two-day event held in May 2019 in the Town

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Hall, which had been attended by senior Officers and 70 members of the public. Officers had also attended a meeting of the Redditch Community Forum to consult about the plans.

- The extent to which small businesses had been consulted about the proposals for the regeneration of the town centre. Members were advised that further consultation had not yet been undertaken as the plans were only at an indicative stage. When specific proposals were brought forward these would be subject to consultation.
- The potential for the Council to secure funding from the Towns Fund and the amount of funding that might be available. Officers explained that up to £25 million was available to Redditch and the Council would need to submit an Investment Plan to secure this funding.
- The requirements for applications for funding from the Towns Fund. Members were advised that the guidance for the fund did not stipulate that organisations would have to apply for funding on a competitive bidding basis. There was the potential that this might be a requirement set out in future guidance.
- The additional funding that was available from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP). Members were informed that the LEP could provide funding from the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) Enabling Fund to support feasibility studies for the next stage of the development. A call for applications was expected to be launched in the following weeks.
- The inclusion of the Smallwood House site in the plans for regenerating the town centre and the potential for social housing to be provided either in that building or immediately behind the property. The Committee was advised that any decisions about social housing would be determined in accordance with the Council's planning policy rules.
- The extent to which partner organisations were likely to join the Council in a public sector community hub. Officers advised that conversations had been held with partner organisations and would continue to take place.
- The potential for the town centre regeneration project to be delivered according to budget. Officers explained that the preliminary work that was being undertaken was designed to enable the Council to manage risks and identify constraints. This would help the Council to more accurately assess likely costs when any work commenced.
- The need for Redditch town centre to be regenerated and the benefits that this might have in respect of the impact on the local economy and the community.

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- The initial plans to introduce a covered walkway between the railway station and the Kingfisher Shopping Centre and the reasons why this had not been progressed. The Committee noted that this proposal had not been considered financially viable. Furthermore, by not acting on this idea alternative schemes that encouraged people to both visit the shopping centre and other parts of the town centre could be explored.
- The financial assumptions in the report and the extent to which the changes to interest rates announced by the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) impacted on this. Officers explained that the figures had been reviewed since the Dragongate report was published to ensure that the projections were based on realistic expectations that reflected current market arrangements. Further assessment of the figures would be required over time in response to any later changes.
- The potential for funding to be provided by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to support the project.
- The need for developers to invest in the project as part of the regeneration works.
- The hard work that had already been undertaken by Officers. Members thanked officers for their work.

During consideration of this matter reference was made to the redevelopment of Church Hill district centre some years previously and the outcomes of this project. Concerns were raised that ward Councillors had not been consulted as part of this process and that this would have benefited the redevelopment of the centre. It was therefore proposed that the relevant ward Councillors should be consulted as the redevelopment of the town centre progressed. However, in discussing this proposal Members noted that the regeneration of Redditch town centre would be significant to all Councillors, regardless of the ward that they represented, due to the importance of the town centre to all residents. Members also noted that there was the possibility that all Councillors would be consulted as the plans progressed. At the end of the debate Members agreed that the fourth proposal in the report should be amended to require consultation with all Councillors

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Council note the BDP Town Centre Sites report and endorses the concept of a comprehensive regeneration scheme for the station quarter, Church Road sites, the Library site and the outdoor market site;**
- 2) the Council agrees the content of the Dragongate Community Hub Business Case and BDP's Redditch**

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Town Centre Development Sites Final Report be used as a basis for submitting a proposal to the Towns Fund; and

- 3) the Council agrees that the content of the Dragongate Community Hub Business Case and BDP's Redditch Town Centre Development Sites Final Report be used as a basis for submitting a bid to the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership's Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) Enabling Fund.
- 4) the findings of the state of the area debate are noted, officers are instructed to produce a future consultation plan related to the town centre regeneration programme and that all Councillors are consulted;
- 5) the content of the Dragongate Community Hub business case (appendix 2) be noted and the Executive Committee endorse the concept of a Community Hub within the Public Sector and Culture quarter;
- 6) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive after consultation with the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnerships to commission an architect-led professional team to draw up feasible and deliverable design proposals supported by viability appraisals for a Community Hub, to include consideration of partners' requirements; and
- 7) subject to the agreement of recommendation 1 above, authority be delegated to the Chief Executive after consultation with the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnerships to work with key partners on the wider initiatives.

54. TASK GROUPS, SHORT SHARP REVIEWS AND WORKING GROUPS - UPDATE REPORTS

The following updates were provided in respect of the work of scrutiny Task Groups and Working Groups:

- a) Budget Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Jenny Wheeler

Councillor Wheeler explained that the group had held a number of meetings since the last meeting of the Committee.

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During these meetings the group had considered information about the Section 24 Notice. Members had concluded that at a challenging time financially for the Council the Budget Scrutiny Working Group had an important role to play in terms of providing assurance to the Executive Committee and scrutinising any plans that might have significant financial implications for the Council.

Redditch Borough Council had an Investment and Acquisition Strategy. Under the terms of this strategy it had been agreed that the Executive Committee should have delegated powers to approve any proposed investments and acquisitions, to ensure that decisions could be taken swiftly in a competitive commercial environment. So far two investments had been approved by the Executive Committee but neither of these had been subject to budget scrutiny. The PWLB had increased borrowing costs and the Council was in a challenging financial position. Councillor Wheeler suggested that in this context the Budget Scrutiny Working Group could add value by scrutinising proposed investments to ensure that the financial projections for each option were sound.

The group had also noted that, following the publication of the Section 24 Notice, difficult decisions would need to be made in order to balance the Council's budget. To enable Members to make financially viable decisions the group was proposing that additional information needed to be provided in the financial implications of reports to Committee. Officers noted that it would be helpful for this additional information to be required where appropriate and this suggestion was endorsed.

b) Parking Enforcement Task Group – Chair, Councillor Mark Shurmer

Officers explained that it was unlikely that any further meetings of the group would take place until after the general election had occurred on 12th December 2019. The Chair had therefore requested that the deadline for completion of the review be moved back to 2020.

c) Performance Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Andrew Fry

Councillor Fry advised that there had been no meeting of the group since the previous meeting of the Committee.

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- d) Suicide Prevention Task Group – Chair, Councillor Debbie Chance

Councillor Chance explained that there were two meetings of the group due to take place in November. It was unlikely that the group would hold any meetings in December. Therefore, the review was likely to be completed in early 2020.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **business cases for new investment and acquisition opportunities for the Council should all be considered by the Budget Scrutiny Working Group before a decision is taken by the Executive Committee;**
- 2) **the financial implications detailed in reports to the Executive Committee should address the following points as a minimum where appropriate:**
 - a) **the financial costs of the proposed action;**
 - b) **the source of funding for the proposed action;**
 - c) **potential alternative options and the financial costs of each alternative option; and**
 - d) **the financial costs to the Council where the proposed action deviates from previous Council policy; and**

RESOLVED that

- 3) **the deadline for completion of the Parking Enforcement Task Group be postponed to early 2020.**

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.19 pm