

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 23rd June, 2022

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Bill Hartnett (Chair), and Councillors Salman Akbar, Joe Baker (substituting for Councillor Joanna Kane), Michael Chalk, Brandon Clayton, Sid Khan and Timothy Pearman

Also Present:

Councillor Matt Dormer – Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnerships

Officers:

Ruth Bamford, Peter Carpenter, Kevin Dicks, Clare Flanagan, Sue Hanley and Ostap Paparega

Democratic Services Officers:

Jo Gresham

14. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Joanna Kane with Councillor Baker as named substitute. Councillor Gareth Prosser also submitted his apologies for this meeting.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no Declarations of Interest nor of any Party Whip.

Chair

16. PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Chair welcomed Mr. P. Berry as a public speaker to the meeting, who was invited to speak to the Committee.

His speech was delivered as follows:

'I was hoping to come along tonight to explain my opposition to the demolition of the Town Centre Library, however, I see from the report that this has again been delayed but I would still hope that even at this late-stage reconsideration can be given to this destruction of a well-used public facility. I look forward to the promised public meeting to take account of the community's views rather than the fait accompli we are currently presented with.

On the Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre, I broadly welcome the investment in new technology. I hope that the Innovation Centre will benefit local people to encourage them to enhance their skills and provide well paid local jobs for Redditch people.

On the Public Realm project, I looked back at the original TIP and failed to identify the specifics of the plan. I note from the current report the increasing number of empty properties. I would be interested to know whether any thought had been given to acquisition of the properties with a view to separating the larger retail units into smaller units, while protecting the historical facades making them more affordable to local small traders or cooperatives and offering more variety and encouraging visitors. Plus, dare I say, to bring back the outdoor market that was taken away.

The space above the units could be transformed into Social Rented accommodation which would help the ever growing Housing list and be an instant rise in people using the High Street. I would suggest that £4.2million would be better spent on these enhancements rather than demolishing our Library.

On the Towns Fund, generally, I have a number of questions:

What will be in the format of the consultation in terms of exhibitions, road shows and public fora?

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The Towns Fund website shows that the last meeting of the board was in November 2021. Has the board met since and when will the minutes of all meetings be published?

What evaluation has been made of utilising local skills, labour and suppliers on the construction projects?

Levelling Up 2

This is the first local report that I have seen on this fund. I see that the deadline for the bid is July 6th which is, again, very short notice for wider public engagement.

I note that the bid will be centred on Winyates and Matchborough. I have the following questions:

The last report that I can find, dated 26th March 2019, suggested that the proposals for the redevelopment would be put out to identify a suitable development partner. What was the outcome of that exercise, and is there still a commitment to two centres?

What are the proposals for future consultation, not just with the tenants and businesses within the centres but with the wider community?

Could this plan be developed to include a bold social / council rented housing program rather than grabbing pieces of existing space for minimal provision.

Once again thank you for your time.

Finally, I see that Redditch has been allocated £2.5 million from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. What is proposed to spend this funding on. The prospectus sets out the creation of Local partnership groups. What form will this group take in Redditch and again can we widen the membership of this group to involve more community representatives?

The Chair then welcomed Ms. R. Sidaway as a public speaker to the meeting, who was invited to speak to the Committee.

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Her speech was delivered as follows:

‘Good Evening Councillors and Officers

We, the Bonham family & Jon Bonham Memorial Friends, are concerned about the possible impact that the demolition of the library building would have on the John Bonham Memorial.

The bronze Memorial was installed on 31st May 2018 which would have been John’s 70th birthday. It was funded in part by worldwide fans’ donations with the Bonham family & ‘friends’ making up the shortfall. It was gifted to the people of Redditch under the care of Redditch Borough Council.

It has now been brought to our attention that consideration is being given to moving the Memorial as part of the creation of a new plaza area, once the library has been demolished. No attempt by RBC/Town Team to inform or discuss this with ourselves has been made. Therefore, we wish to place on formal record our strongest objection to this idea on 2 key counts:

1. Orientation of the Memorial

During the design & development phases, the sculptor undertook a number of visits to the Mercian Square site to assess the natural light falling on and around the location at different times of the day. He also calculated how this would change throughout the year. This is important to how people view the detail of the sculpture

2. Liability

We wish to stress that it is not possible to move the Memorial without a high risk of damage to the structure:

- A structural engineer, working with RBC Engineering Officer, was consulted to provide a suitable specification for the installation of the structure taking into consideration (a) the tree roots and ground beneath it, and (b) to make it ‘theft-proof’ and thereby difficult to remove

- The structure was cast in 3 vertical sections and then expertly “fused” together by highly skilled technicians at the foundry. Any attempt to move the structure would likely cause it to break-up.

The Memorial is made of Bronze, weighs over 1000kg, and cost around £100,000 to design, manufacture and install. It cannot be moved.

Thank you.’

17. REDDITCH TOWN INVESTMENT PLAN BUSINESS CASES - PRE-SCRUTINY (REPORT TO FOLLOW)

The Head of Planning Regeneration and Leisure Services presented the report in respect of the Redditch Town Investment Plan Business Cases. Prior to the presentation of the report, Officers apologised for the late circulation of the reports contained within the Additional Papers pack.

During consideration of this item the following was highlighted for Members attention:

- Redditch Borough Council had submitted a bid to the Government in January 2021 and were awarded in excess of £15 million to spend on particular regeneration projects in the town centre. The three projects that had been approved were the Redditch Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre, Redditch Town Centre Public Realm and the Redevelopment of Redditch Library Site. Members were reminded that the deadline for the submission bid for the Redevelopment of Redditch Library had been extended and therefore consideration of this project was not appropriate at this meeting. Members were informed that there would be an opportunity to scrutinise this bid in a separate report to the Executive Committee in September 2022.
- The business cases included in the report provided more detailed information regarding the agreed projects and would inform the summary statements to the Government which were due to be submitted by 29th June 2022.

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- Information included in the appendices to the report was not complete, however the bid would continue to be worked on until submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities on 29th June 2022. It was acknowledged by Officers that this was not ideal, however it was clarified that the deadlines were set by Central Government and were extremely tight and challenging. It was confirmed that the risks of the projects had been examined by relevant Officers within the Council who were satisfied with the proposals due for submission. It was also clarified that the risks and project timelines would be carefully monitored by North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWEDR) along with the S151 Officer at the Council.
- In respect of the Redditch Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre, Officers informed the Committee that the business cases had identified that the project would need further funding of £2m due to contingency costs and consideration of the future cost of inflation. It was noted that there would be discussions undertaken with external funding sources including the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) in order to potentially provide additional support in any shortfall in costs.

During a robust debate, the Committee once again highlighted the lack of detail contained within the report and appendices and the difficulty in scrutinising a report which only provided limited detail. Members stated that it was positive that the Borough had received £15.5m to undertake these projects. However as this was such a significant amount of funding it would have been preferable to see a thorough breakdown of the allocation of funds in order to have a better understanding of the proposals. Officers understood Members' frustration regarding the limited information contained within the report however it was reiterated that updates needed to be continually made until the formal submission date of the bid on 29th June 2022.

Further detailed discussion followed regarding the positive impact the funding would have on the Town Centre and that it was important to get the business cases in by the deadline in order to ensure that all available monies would be able to be drawn down.

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Members were in agreement that this was an exciting and aspirational opportunity for Redditch Town Centre.

On being put the vote it was

RECOMMENDED that

the two business cases attached as Appendices 1 and 2 be endorsed and used to present summary information for submission to the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities on the 29 June 2022.

18. LEVELLING UP FUND 2 BID - PRE-SCRUTINY (REPORT TO FOLLOW)

The Head of Planning, Leisure and Regeneration presented the Levelling Up Fund 2 Bid report and highlighted the following for Members' consideration:

- The Levelling Up Fund was a national scheme and that Local Authorities were invited to undertake a competitive process to bid for up to £20 million funding under the second phase of the scheme. It was stated by Officers that the Council would need to demonstrate as part of its bid that match funding of 10 per cent was available if any bid was successful. Clarification was requested from Members regarding the potential amount of match funding that would be necessary. Officers explained that the amount of additional funding would be dependent on the amount of any funding awarded by the Government e.g., if the full allocation of £20m was awarded the match funding from alternative sources would need to be £2m. The Committee queried whether the allocation of £2m would be possible given the challenging budget of the Council. It was explained that it was a requirement of the Bid and that all potential revenue streams would be explored in identifying additional funding. Furthermore, the Interim Section 151 Officer reported that any additional funding would be a Capital Investment and would be spread over 40 years. The report set out that this funding was for the commercial and infrastructure works. The Housing works would require separate investment. Members

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were informed that the deadline for submission of the bid to the Government was 6th July 2022.

- The second round of Levelling Up funding focussed on the following three key themes:
 - Transport
 - Regeneration and Town Centre
 - Culture and Heritage

Of these three themes officers had identified that the Regeneration and Town Centre theme provided the greatest chance of successfully bidding for funding and that Matchborough and Winyates District Centres would be the focus of the proposal due to the significant amount of preparatory work that had already been undertaken. Much like the regeneration of Church Hill District Centre previously, it was hoped that the regeneration of Matchborough and Winyates District Centres would provide transformation and would result in a positive impact on the local centres and their communities.

Members commented that this was an exciting prospect for the Borough and thanked all of the Officers involved in the preparation of the bid for the second phase of Levelling Up funding.

On being put to the vote Members agreed that the following recommendations be endorsed.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Executive Committee endorse this report and give delegated authority to the Executive Director for Resources (S151 Officer) and the Head of NWEDR (Senior Responsible Owner) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnerships to submit a Levelling Up Fund bid, as detailed in the report.**

- 2) the Executive Committee recommend to Council a match funding contribution of 10% of the total bid value up to £2 million.
- 3) should the submitted LUF Bid be successful, that Executive Committee recommend to Council the allocation of 10% of the total bid value in the Capital Programme.

19. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME - SELECTING ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY

The minutes from the Executive Committee meeting held on Tuesday 14th June 2022 were submitted for Members' consideration.

During consideration of the Executive Committee's Work Programme, it was noted that many of the items included had been picked up for pre-scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Chair noted this and informed Members that this might result in longer meetings in the future.

RESOLVED that

the contents of the Executive Committee Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 14th June 2022 and the Executive Committee's Work Programme be noted.

20. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

During consideration of the Committee's Work Programme, Councillor Khan suggested that a future Task Group be established in respect of health inequalities within Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities within Redditch. The Senior Democratic Services Officer present undertook to contact Councillor Khan to provide a Topic Proposal Scoping document.

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RESOLVED that

The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.58 pm