

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2021

Present: Councillors Mrs Blackmore, Brice, Burton (Chairman), Cooke, Cox, English, Harper, Joy, Kimmance, Munford, Parfitt-Reid, Perry and Mrs Ring

Also Present: Councillor M Rose

81. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Hastie, Khadka and Round.

82. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Councillor Joy was present as Substitute for Councillor Khadka.

83. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items, however additional nominations had been received for Item 13 – Appointment to the One Maidstone BID Advisory Board.

84. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

Councillor M Rose was present as a Visiting Member for Item 18 – Archbishops Palace – Public Consultation and Item 19 – Flood Risk Alleviation.

85. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

Councillor Harper stated that he was the Council's representative for the Citizens Advice Bureau, in relation to Item 16 – Recovery and Renewal Action Plan.

86. **DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING**

Councillors Mrs Blackmore, Brice, Burton, Cooke, Cox, English, Harper, Kimmance, Munford, Parfitt-Reid and Perry had been lobbied on Item 14 – Public Sector-Led Garden Community Update.

Councillors Burton, Cooke, Cox, English, Harper, Kimmance and Perry had been lobbied on Item 18 – Archbishops Palace – Public Consultation.

Councillor Perry had been lobbied on Item 19 – Flood Risk Alleviation – Update.

87. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public, unless any Member of the Committee wished to refer to Item 20 – Minutes (Part II) of the Meeting held on 15 September 2021 and Item 21 – Exempt Appendix (Item 15) – Cost Comparison Table.

88. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 SEPTEMBER 2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes (Parts I and II) of the Meeting held on 15 September 2021 be agreed as a correct record and signed.

89. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

90. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were two questions from members of the public.

Question from Mr Steve Heeley to the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee

At the last P&R meeting on 9th September when I asked about progress with getting option agreements signed for land in relation to the Heathlands proposal, you blamed the delay on lawyers' holidays and said that they were due to be signed "very, very imminently". It is surprising therefore that this meeting's update report states that landowners and their agents didn't even receive the draft option agreements until 4th October. Obviously, each of our definitions of 'imminent' are wildly different. The report now claims that 'the majority of these agreements will have been entered into by the end of this month'. How confident are you that this latest estimated milestone will be met?

Mr Heeley asked the following supplementary question:

'If you don't meet the agreements by the end of this month and landowners aren't willing to sign your options agreement are you going to be threatening compulsory purchase?'

The Chairman responded to the supplementary question.

Question from Ms Kate Hammond to the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee

The long-awaited Heathlands masterplan was finally published as part of the Local Plan Review evidence base on 24th September some six months on from when lawyers acting for SOHL repeated their demand for land to be removed that belonged to small landowners or face further legal action. Residents are pleased that MBC have finally seen sense and removed land that they did not have any authority over. Many Lenham

Heath residents have been deeply upset and made ill by the rogue actions of this Council. How will you be compensating them for this ordeal?

The Chairman responded to the question and provided further clarification to Ms Hammond when requested.

Ms Hammond asked the following supplementary question:

'Will you offer an apology to residents when their land was included without their consent?'

The Chairman responded to the supplementary question.

The full responses were recorded on the webcast and made available to view on the Maidstone Borough Council website. The question-and-answer session took place between minutes 11:55 to 16:20 of the recording.

To access the webcast, please use the link below:

[Policy and Resources Committee - 20 October 2021 - YouTube](#)

91. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

92. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee informed that a Property Acquisition item would be presented at the November 2021 meeting.

A report on the Council's proposed '1000 homes' commitment would be presented at the earliest opportunity. The Communities, Housing and Environment Committee would be considering the potential for the re-use of disposed household items in the near future.

RESOLVED: That the amended Committee Work Programme be noted.

93. APPOINTMENT TO THE ONE MAIDSTONE BID ADVISORY BOARD

The nominations received from Councillors Brice, Garten and Kimmance were considered.

RESOLVED: That Councillors Brice and Kimmance be appointed to the One Maidstone BID Advisory Board effective from 25 October 2021, for a period of one year.

94. PUBLIC SECTOR-LED GARDEN COMMUNITY UPDATE

The Director of Regeneration and Place introduced the report and referenced the partnership between Homes England and the Council. The options agreements would be finalised between the former and the principal landowners in the near future.

The Heathlands Garden Community Proposal had been included in the Regulation 19 'draft for submission' documents stage of the Local Plan Review, with the subsequent public consultation to take place between 29 October 2021 to 12 December 2021. As the land promoters, the Council and Homes England would be undertaking further public engagement exercises with 'We are Fabrick'. The proposal would continue to be developed in response to that engagement and the public responses to the Regulation 19 public consultation. A pre-briefing would be arranged for the local Ward and Parish Councillors before the engagement exercises commenced.

The Council and Homes England would be preparing the Town Planning Strategy, as part of the collaboration agreement in place, to be presented to the Committee in the last quarter of the financial year.

In response to questions the Director of Regeneration and Place confirmed that Homes England were leading on the appointment of an external consultant to further develop the business case submitted to Network Rail. The latter had sent the Council a 'Letter of Content', with further work necessary to find a suitable option.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Note: Due to the technical difficulties experienced during the introduction of this item, the Officer's introduction was made publicly available on the Council's website.

These difficulties took place between 6.53 p.m. to 6.57 p.m.

Councillor Brice temporarily left the meeting between 6.58 p.m. to 6.59 p.m.

95. PROPOSED REFURBISHMENT OF THE COUNCIL OWNED STILEBRIDGE LANE & WATER LANE G&T SITES

The Director of Regeneration and Place introduced the report and noted that the revised scope and cost of the project had been re-presented to and endorsed by the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee on 5 October 2021.

In response to questions, the Director of Regeneration and Place stated that the advice given by FFT was appropriate, but that after further research traditional construction methods would achieve the best value for money. The project's increased scope was attributed to the drainage infrastructure, greater dilapidation of the site than expected and constraints within the construction industry. It was confirmed that the Council would enter into a fixed price contract with the chosen contractor, with the risk of a price increase low due to the short construction period of under 24 weeks.

There had been significant communication between Kent County Council (KCC) as the sites' manager, the Council and representatives of the Gypsy

and Traveller Council to prepare for the works commencement alongside the measures in place for residents whilst they occurred. The scheme would be overseen internally by the Housing Client Team, with the works to be signed off in interim periods by FFT, acting as Contract Administrator and overall Project Manager. The informal aspiration to transfer the sites to KCC was reiterated, as no transfer would occur without the necessary works completion.

The Committee expressed support for the proposed works and reiterated that the sites' current conditions were unsuitable and should be improved, alongside the Council's obligations as the landlord.

The increased cost was noted and it was felt that oversight of the project through the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the CHE Committee was required, as that Committee was responsible for the overall project.

RESOLVED: That

1. The budget for the project within the capital programme be increased from £1million to £1.9million, with the balance coming from the affordable housing capital expenditure budget; and
2. Oversight of the project and any potential cost movement be managed by the Director of Regeneration and Place in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee.

96. RECOVERY AND RENEWAL ACTION PLAN

The Chief Executive introduced the report and referenced the feedback received from the Council's other Service Committees after consideration of the actions within their respective remits.

The previous feedback received from the Committee had been reflected in the increased funding for the Town Centre Strategy in the 2021-2022 financial year. The additional funds required would be considered as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and budget setting process for 2022-23 and onwards. The funding for the 'Way we Work' action had been reduced but still allowed for continued investment alongside Tunbridge Wells and Swale Borough Councils to provide improved technology and extended training opportunities for staff.

Specific attention was drawn to the Economic Regeneration and Leisure (ERL) Committee feedback, as it was requested that the funding for the Mid-Kent College Skills Hub be doubled to £60,000 alongside the implementation of regular monitoring arrangements. The requested Riverside Lights project had not been included as it was due to be further considered by the ERL Committee and if agreed would need to be financed through alternative means of capital funding.

In response to questions, the Head of Policy, Communications and Governance stated that the quarterly Key Performance Indicators for the

ERL Committee could not be provided monthly as they derived from external sources. The importance of data analytics through the ongoing creation of live dashboards was reiterated, to enable all Councillors to access up-to-date information with ease.

The Chief Executive clarified that the Community Resilience Fund would allow for community groups to submit bids for funding. Local Ward Members were encouraged to partake in the process through informing residents of the scheme and providing insight to the relevant Council officers. The 'Love Where You Live' action would allow the Council to be proactive in encouraging the creation of community groups across the borough, where there were no existing groups, for the betterment of local areas.

The Committee expressed support for the ambitious nature and scope of the Recovery and Renewal Plan and reiterated the importance of providing a Town Centre Strategy that, whilst strategic in nature, provided for and was supported by local people.

In response to questions, the Chief Executive stated that the Committee could be updated on any significant issues or actions as necessary, through the quarterly performance updates presented to the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Recovery and Renewal Action Plan and the associated costs, shown in Appendices A and B to the report respectively, be approved.

97. EQUALITIES OBJECTIVES AND ACTION PLAN - UPDATE

The Senior Policy and Communities Officer introduced the report and noted that since significant progress had been made as outlined in Appendix 1 to the report.

The strengthened relationship between the Council and the community and voluntary sectors was highlighted, due to the co-operative work undertaken to provide support to residents during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Rough Sleeping initiative implemented by the housing team continued to support approximately 360 households and had been extended until March 2022.

To further understand the impacts of the pandemic and the requirements of the borough, extensive consultation exercises had been undertaken; 23 in 2020-2021 of which 14 were for the public and stakeholders. 15 consultations had taken place so far in 2021-2022.

The Access to Services review conducted by members of the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee, and the review of Maidstone Museums' collections and creation of a community panel was noted.

The Heart of Kent Hospice (HOKH) Elmer Trail had taken place in the Summer of 2021, with a steering group created between officers of the

former and the Council, to progress the work required on the Council's 'Compassionate Borough' status, as agreed by the Committee in January 2020.

The Learning and Development package provided to the Council's staff was highlighted, which included regular sessions on maintaining mental health and wellbeing and the introduction of mental health first aiders.

In response to questions, the Head of Policy, Communications and Governance confirmed that the Councillor training budget could be used to provide Mental Health First Aider training to Councillors.

The Committee expressed support for the work undertaken and reiterated the importance of being able to effectively engage and communicate with all residents, alongside the provision of widely accessible resources. The significance of the Compassionate Community Awards was noted.

RESOLVED: That the progress made on the Equalities Objectives and Action Plan as shown in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.

98. ARCHBISHOP'S PALACE - PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Interim Strategic Property Consultant introduced the report and noted that the public consultation on the proposed future use of Archbishops Palace was open until the 31 October 2021. The consultation had been advertised on the Council's website and social media, with posters and flyers provided at venues with high footfall.

The results received had given a good indication of the public's preferred option, with the six options included in the consultation outlined. An additional 38 responses had been received since the report's publication with further responses expected before the consultation's end. The consultation allowed respondents to suggest alternative uses for consideration.

In response to questions, the Director of Finance and Business Improvement confirmed that the Committee would be able to provide feedback on the Expressions of Interest (EOI) received, which would be passed to the organisations that had submitted the EOIs.

Several Members of the Committee felt that the results of the public consultation should have been presented after the consultation's end, as many individuals and organisations had not yet submitted a response. The importance of responses from organisations that represented the Community were highlighted.

During the debate, the historical significance of the building and its contribution to the local community and cultural and economic prosperity of the town centre was highlighted. However, the importance of a commercially viable option to support its continued use and maintenance was reiterated.

RESOLVED: That

1. The outcomes of the consultation be noted;
2. Officers will incorporate the results of the consultation when inviting Expressions of Interest from developers and consultants to carry out the Stage 1 project work at Archbishop Palace, be noted; and
3. A full report of the consultation responses be presented to the Committee as part of the Expressions of Interest presented in January 2022.

99. **FLOOD RISK ALLEVIATION - UPDATE**

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement introduced the report and referenced the instances of flooding as outlined in the report. Progress continued on the Medway Street Flood Barrier and the works to Mote Park Dam were nearing completion; only the regeneration of two sluice gates remained, to provide increased resilience against potential flooding, to commence on the 2 November 2021 and be completed by Christmas 2021.

A natural wetland in Staplehurst was proposed to absorb any flood waters before it reached the river Beult and caused flooding downstream, with further details provided in Appendix B to the report. The scheme would be financed in the main by the Environment Agency, with a £13,000 contribution requested from the Council.

In response to questions, the Director of Finance and Business Improvement confirmed that glass flood barriers had been implemented elsewhere and that further details of those schemes could be provided to the Committee. The Countryside Stewardship grant was highlighted.

The Committee expressed support for the natural flood measure proposed, which could only be achieved due to the landowner's consent. There were concerns however that further measures were needed to achieve a cumulative affect across Staplehurst and wider areas of the borough and that the local Ward Member(s) should be consulted on any future proposals, to increase stakeholder and resident engagement in the process.

Several Members highlighted other flood risk areas that should be investigated where possible, such as flooding in the town centre and that arising from new developments.

RESOLVED: That

1. The progress with flood management initiatives delivered by the Council as part of the Medway Flood Partnership, be noted;

2. £13,352 be allocated for the Natural Flood Management scheme as described in paragraph 2.17 of the report and appendix b to the report, subject to confirmation of match funding; and
3. The request for better consultation with Ward Members and other affected parties on future schemes, be noted.

100. MINUTES (PART II) OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 SEPTEMBER 2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes (Part II) of the Meeting held on 15 September 2021 be considered alongside Item 8 – Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 September 2021.

101. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 9.32 p.m.