

Regeneration, Masterplanning and Project Co-Ordination Board

Notes of a Meeting of the Regeneration, Masterplanning and Project Co-Ordination Board held on the **29th January 2020**.

Present:

Cllr. Clarkson (Chairman)

Cllr. Clokie (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Barrett, Buchanan, Farrell, Forest, B Heyes, Ovenden, Shorter

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (c) Councillors Forest and B Heyes attended as Substitute Members for Councillors Feacey and Bartlett.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Bartlett, Feacey.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Wedgbury, White.

Chief Executive, Head of Community Safety and Wellbeing, Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications, Head of Corporate Property and Projects, Head of Culture, Head of Environment and Land Management, Head of Planning and Development, Commercial Development and Regeneration Manager, Compliance and Data Protection Manager, Economic Development Manager, Town Centre Regeneration Manager, Senior Accountant, Member Services Manager (Operational).

1 Terms of Reference

- 1.1 The report set out proposed Terms of Reference for this Board and the new Vicarage Lane Redevelopment Advisory Committee that reported to it. Terms of Reference for the new Elwick Road Phase II Redevelopment Advisory Committee would follow at a future meeting. The re-named Victoria, Conningbrook and Discovery Parks Advisory Committee would work to the Terms of Reference of the existing Task Group, with the addition of Discovery Park.
- 1.2 The Leader directed attention to the structure diagram on page 4 of the Agenda, showing how the three Advisory Committees would feed in to this Board. The Minutes of the Advisory Committees would routinely come to this Board for information and they had the ability to report any specific issues to the Board or ultimately the Cabinet/Full Council.

- 1.3 In response to a question about the make-up of the Vicarage Lane Redevelopment Advisory Committee, the Leader said all Members were welcome to attend meetings, but he would be happy to add a couple of non-Cabinet Members to the Committee. Accordingly it was proposed to add Councillors Farrell and Ovenden to the membership of the Vicarage Lane Redevelopment Advisory Committee. The Commercial Development and Regeneration Manager would also be added to the Core Officer Group for this Committee.

Recommended:

- That (i) **the Terms of Reference of the Regeneration, Masterplanning and Project Co-Ordination Board, as appended to these Notes, be approved and adopted.**
- (ii) **subject to the additions in membership listed above, and the Terms of Reference of the Vicarage Lane Redevelopment Advisory Committee, as appended to these Notes, be approved and adopted.**

2 Update from Task Groups

- 2.1 The Head of Corporate Property and Projects introduced the report which advised that in March 2019 the Cabinet had approved the initiation of work to develop the masterplan for the Vicarage Lane/Bingo site into a planning application and to develop out the project to an approved budget. The Cabinet had also approved the delivery route; namely the appointment of a Development Manager to progress the development on the Council's behalf. The report updated the Board on the progress of the project since March 2019. Updates on progress would be regularly reported to the newly formed Advisory Committee which in turn would report to this Board.
- 2.2 The Leader gave an update on the appointment process for the architects and the strong Member involvement in this. Whilst this project had to be viable and stand up financially, he stressed the need for quality and something special in this part of the Town Centre.
- 2.3 In response to questions about third party land and a pedestrian route from the Churchyard to the Lower High Street, the Leader advised that negotiations were at an early stage but it was hoped that they would not have to pursue the compulsory purchase route. The Head of Planning and Development further advised that the masterplan had been generally well received by the design review panel – Design South East and it was considered that a pedestrian route through to the Lower High Street would add significant benefit to the project.
- 2.4 In terms of an update on the Elwick II Redevelopment Project, the Head of Corporate Property and Projects advised that a report was coming to the Cabinet on the 27th February. The Terms of Reference of the new Advisory

Committee would also come to the next Meeting of this Board, at which point it was hoped that the Committee could begin to start meeting.

Resolved:

That the project updates contained within the report be received and noted.

3 Developing a Programme of Future Projects

3.1 The Compliance and Data Protection Manager introduced the report which advised that a programme of projects was being developed to support the delivery of the Council's ambitions in the emerging Corporate Plan. This included the Council's new "Big 8" Projects which would be overseen by the Ashford Strategic Delivery Board and a fuller list including projects encompassing: - the Town Centre programme; cost neutral projects; income generator/invest to save projects; the Housing Revenue Account; and the Infrastructure Fund. The report sought the views of the Board on the proposed projects in order to determine if they provided the right balance to deliver the Council's ambitions. Of course, the list was not definitive, it was indicative and needed to remain flexible as new opportunities arose and priorities changed. Comments were welcomed and any future changes to the programme would be brought to this Board, together with a regular update on the programme for monitoring.

3.2 During discussion on this item the following points were raised: -

- There was concern about a potential abundance of Community Centres and an increase potentially saturating a market that was already struggling in some existing areas. Specific reference was made to Finberry, when there were already Community Centres nearby in Kingsnorth and Singleton. Whilst the point was understood, it was also noted that there were many areas that were reporting they did not have enough community space so it was a delicate balance. Many were provided as part of a Section 106 agreement, but the Council would always look at the need of an area. Perhaps the focus should be on providing more, but smaller, meeting places than larger Community Centres.
- In terms of transport infrastructure modelling, which was one of the new "Big 8", a Member considered there needed to be a focus on capacity at Ashford International Station. The congestion at peak times was becoming a real problem and he considered that the space, particularly at the station forecourt, was simply far too small. The Economic Development Manager said that the problems were well recognised and this had been identified as a potential 'cost neutral' project, however it was such a complex issue because of land ownership and franchising. Discussions were just getting underway with Southeastern to understand their ambitions, and there was a lot going on behind the scenes in terms of the forecourt areas as well as

sustainable travel and walking/cycling schemes, but this would inevitably be a longer term project.

- When considering the Town Centre programme, the Board considered the figure set aside for high profile events over the next two years was a little high and could be reduced. There was support for something similar to the Illuminities event and making this a regular timetabled event that people would look out for on the calendar, but the allocated budget was currently too high. An update on the Illuminities 2019 events would be given later at this Meeting.
- There was support for the continuation of the Create Platform events, in the run up to the Create Festival, as this was an opportunity to showcase a wider variety of arts and music than the festival itself. Perhaps some thought could be given to ways to better utilising the existing Town Centre bandstand for this purpose and others.
- A grant scheme to support retailers to improve their shop frontages was welcomed. There was also some discussion about the rear of shops and their storage of rubbish which was also an issue. The Head of Environment and Land Management said that this was an issue that could be covered under the Duty of Care and the new Enforcement Team.
- With regard to the re-surfacing of the road in the Lower High Street, it was agreed that this should be an absolute priority, but it had to interact with other developments in the Lower High Street and Vicarage Lane. It was also noted that the re-surfacing of the road was only a small part of the issue for traders in the Lower High Street and there did need to be a management of the decline in that area.
- In addition to the planned elements of the Town Centre Programme, Board Members also thought there would be merit in undertaking a wider review of traffic lights and priorities around the Town Centre and the Shared Space. The Leader said that a Strategic Transport Assessment would form part of the Integrated Transport Strategy in the Big 8.
- The project contingency of £270k was seen as very high. The Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications advised that this was a figure of £90k per year for three years. The money had not yet been spent though so much of it could be reallocated to different projects.
- The Board discussed monitoring of the Town Centre and whether any Officers were responsible for undertaking regular inspections or 'walkabouts'. It was explained that there were various Officers across the Council who were regularly in and around the Town Centre such as those in Economic Development, Corporate Property, Facilities, BIFFA,

Aspire, along with the KCC Safety Inspectors and reports from members of the public. The Council had a Town Centre Regeneration Manager, but this was more of a dynamic role than the previous Town Centre Partnership and it was considered that their time was better spent in other areas of work. A dedicated inspection process would require another additional resource. There was a feeling that the reporting of problems and incidents was a joint responsibility of all, and the on-line reporting tools should also make this process easier. The Head of Corporate Property and Projects said he would give his Officers a checklist to report back on obvious issues when they were in the Town Centre.

The Board considered that, subject to the comments above, the project list appended to the report did provide the right balance to deliver the Council's ambitions. Members were encouraged to continue to have a close look at the list and feed back to the Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications if they had any specific comments by Friday 7th February 2020. It was acknowledged that the list was a work in progress and would come back to each meeting of the Board for regular monitoring, but work should begin on developing the individual projects at the appropriate times. Each project would be subject to the normal approvals process set out in the Terms of Reference.

Resolved:

- That (i) **subject to the comments above, the proposed project list set out at Appendix A to the report, be agreed as providing the right balance to deliver the Council's ambitions. Any additional comments should be fed back to the Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications by Friday 7th February 2020.**
- (ii) **the delivery of projects within the proposed programme be regularly monitored by this Board.**

4 Ashford Town Centre Framework – Progress Report

- 4.1 The report provided an update on the progress made towards the delivery of the Ashford Town Centre Framework 2019 – 2025, which was adopted by the Cabinet in March 2019. The Leader thanked the Compliance and Data Protection Manager for the report and asked Members to feed back any particular comments to her.

Resolved:

That the progress made towards the delivery of the Ashford Town Centre Framework 2019 – 2025 be noted.

5 Illuminities – Initial Feedback

- 5.1 The Town Centre Regeneration Manager gave a presentation which updated on the collection of Illuminities events in December 2019 – Glow International; the Ashford Winter Festival; and the Carnival of the Baubles. The presentation contained more detailed attendance and engagement figures for the events and the Town Centre in general, and the message was a positive one in terms of attendance, footfall, business feedback and the sense of pride and community that the events had engendered. The Carnival of the Baubles event had included engagement with six local Primary Schools and resulted in a procession of giant, illuminated baubles, decorated by the children. The Council had worked with Emergency Exit Arts and the intention was for that relationship to continue and be part of the calendar of events in the future. The first weekend of events had also coincided with the opening of the Coachworks and brought additional visitors to that development.
- 5.2 A Member asked if he could be provided with more information on the Coachworks development. Whilst he welcomed the idea of the development, as somebody who worked in the area, he had received a lot of questions about what was going on there and opening times. There appeared to be little consistency at the moment and he was concerned that a potentially good opportunity for the town could end up not being used to its full capabilities. The Chief Executive accepted this point and said the Coachworks was still a work in progress.
- 5.3 The Chairman asked for copies of the presentation to be sent to all staff and Members. Illuminities was an extremely positive news story and a cause for celebration and congratulations. ***(N.B. The presentation is appended to these notes for information).***

Resolved:

That the update be received and noted.

6 Date of Next Meeting

- 6.1 Wednesday 29th April 2020, 2pm, Council Chamber.

Councillor Clarkson
Chairman – Regeneration, Masterplanning and Project Co-Ordination Board

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