

**Notes of a Meeting of the
Ashford Town Centre Place Making Board
Thursday 6th December 2018 at 4.00 p.m.**

Present:

Board Members

Cllr. Clarkson (Chairman)
Cllr. Galpin (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Mrs Bell, Bennett, Clokie, Ovenden, Shorter.

Non-Board Members

Cllrs. Farrell, Heyes, Suddards.

Chief Executive, Director of Place and Space, Director of Finance and Economy, Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications, Head of Environment and Land Management, Head of Corporate Property and Projects, Head of Planning and Development, Head of Culture, Economic Development Manager, Senior Commercial Development Manager, Senior Communications Officer, National Management Trainee, Member Services Manager (Operational).

Apology

Cllr. Bell.

Item	Notes	Action
1.	<p>Notes of Previous Meeting – 11th October 2018</p> <p>Noted and agreed.</p>	
2.	<p>Theatre Study</p> <p>The Head of Culture introduced the item and directed Members attention to the Fourth Street Study into prospective theatre provision in Ashford, which had been tabled at the meeting. Whilst relatively high level and not looking at specific sites, it had provided a review of different options and commented on potential size of venue, demand, population and audience development. The report also acknowledged that Ashford was a growing and ambitious town, but there was a need to build gradually and test for potential audiences.</p> <p>The Leader said he welcomed the report but wanted to reiterate Ashford’s ambition and said that in his opinion, the</p>	

	<p>medium term recommendation for a 300 seat facility did fall short. A standalone theatre was probably not the answer, but a multi-functional facility incorporating theatre, along with perhaps conferences, a gallery, a museum and other elements would seem to be a more sustainable way forward. There was a worth to having such a facility in the town and, to do it properly, he considered it would only be right and proper for the Council to contribute some sort of subsidy, but it would be equally important to make sure it was analysed properly and they did not over-commit. He considered the Fourth Street report was a positive one and provided a good base to move forward.</p> <p>Board Members generally agreed that any potential facility should be multi-functional and flexible but would have to be of a reasonable size to attract the sort of acts and performances needed to make it viable. The conference element was also attractive as it would fill a gap in the market, particularly with Ashford's links to international rail services. It was however important to note the points on financial viability and the reality that the facility, especially initially, would require significant support funding. The report provided a good base to start from, but this was only the first step in a longer term project.</p> <p>The Director of Place and Space advised that the Fourth Street report would be made publically available ahead of the Council meeting the following week which would be debating the petition calling for the Mecca Bingo building to be converted in to a theatre.</p>	
3.	<p>Emerging Town Centre Framework</p> <p>The Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications introduced the item and directed the Board's attention to the framework document in the papers. This work had all been the subject of discussion with Members previously, but as further work was being undertaken on the action plans that sat behind the framework document ahead of consideration by the Cabinet in March, and there had been slight amendments to the original vision statement and objectives, Officers wanted the Board to confirm their continued support, provide a steer on priority activities/projects and remove any ideas that they considered should not be pursued. The Cabinet report would also include the full findings from the public consultation and seek approval to undertake a further short stakeholder consultation.</p> <p>Members said they supported the direction of travel and</p>	

	<p>highlighted the following areas as particular priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackling the perception of crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) for Victoria Ward. • Improving public transport provision (particularly in the evening). • Building on Ashford’s food and drink offer. • Increasing the mix of housing delivered in the town centre. • Promotion and expansion of the community toilet scheme. <p>The Leader said he supported the direction of the framework document and considered that many of the concerns about the town centre in the evening (economy, activity, public transport, ASB) would be addressed by the developments happening in Ashford. They were valid concerns, but the new cinema, brewery and eateries would all make the town centre a more vibrant place in the evenings and the footfall that these generated would help to tackle those perceived problems.</p> <p>The Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications thanked Members for their feedback and encouraged any further comments by email. In terms of the lists at the bottom of each column entitled “Ideas Suggested Through the Town Centre Consultation Process”, she asked that these be ranked in terms of priority via the Work Groups and reported back to her.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">LF</p> <p style="text-align: center;">LF/Lead Officers</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Recent Government Initiatives for Town Centres</p> <p>The National Management Trainee introduced the report and advised that it explored the implications to the Council of Government Policy proposals from the Autumn budget statement. These were designed to help high streets and town centres adapt to the changing way people used town centres and the associated challenges. These included the Future High Streets Fund (for which Ashford would be encouraged to make bids), Business Rates Relief and Planning Reforms to support high streets and increase the delivery of new homes.</p> <p>Both the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Property and the National Management Trainee endeavoured to keep the Board updated with developments when Government released the full details later in the year.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">YA</p>

5.	<p>Mecca Bingo/Vicarage Lane Site – Delivery Options and Next Steps</p> <p>The Director of Place and Space introduced the item and advised that it would be taken in two parts. Firstly this Board would consider the scheme in principle, whilst the subsequent Economic Regeneration and Investment Board meeting happening later that afternoon would consider the issue as the landowner of the site.</p> <p>The Senior Commercial Development Manager gave a short presentation and showed a video outlining the proposed development for the site. Members had previously been shown the plans from the appointed architect and they had generated considerable enthusiasm. A report was proposed to be submitted to the Cabinet in March, based on the proposals in the report, and explaining in more detail the choice of delivery arrangement proposed and the financial basis, along with a risk assessment.</p> <p>The Board again expressed its support for the principle of progressing the scheme and, subject to the outcome of the debate on the petition surrounding the future use of the site at the following weeks Full Council meeting, and the satisfactory conclusion of initial site and building due diligence, asked for preparations to continue whilst further detailed assessment was carried out. The concept had evolved from the idea of a demolition to a whole new public realm and the Board expressed its excitement over the proposals.</p> <p>Action:</p> <p>The Board agrees that the scheme should be progressed and preparations continue whilst further detailed assessment is carried out.</p>	SS
6.	<p>Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>TBC</p>	

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