

RESPONSE TO DECISIONS MADE BY CABINET IN RESPONSE TO PETITION RELATING TO NEW ASH GREEN VILLAGE CENTRE SUBMITTED TO FULL COUNCIL

Cabinet 21 April 2016

Report of Chief Officer Communities & Business

Status: For consideration

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary:

On 17 September, Members considered a report under matters referred from Council which summarised the issues raised in the petition presented to Council on 22 July 2015, the action taken by the Council to date, and recommending the focus for the Council's future involvement in matters relating to New Ash Green Village Centre.

This report summarises the progress that has made in accordance with the decisions reached by Cabinet.

Portfolio Holder Cllr Hogarth

Contact Officer(s) Robin Cooper Ext. 7099 / Alan Whiting Ext. 7446

Recommendation to Cabinet

Members are asked to note the Council's progress in response to issues raised by the petition.

Reason for recommendation

To set out progress made in relation to the decisions reached by Cabinet on 17 September 2015.

Introduction

- 1 On 21 July, a petition was presented to full Council for consideration as part of The Petition Scheme at Appendix Y of this Council's Constitution.
- 2 The petition contains over 1,500 signatures and calls upon the Council to "take a more active role" and take "urgent steps" to make sure that the landowners bring the Village Centre "up to an acceptable standard"
- 3 On 17 September, under matters referred by Council, Cabinet considered a full briefing on the background to the Council's involvement in the New Ash

Green Village Centre. The report responded to specific concerns raised as part of the petition and brought Members up to date with current issues.

Background

- 4 There are three main landowners with interests in New Ash Green Village Centre. Piperton Finance is the largest landowner, and holds the contract on behalf of the other landowners to maintain the village centre.
- 5 Piperton Finance is represented in the UK by Richmond Lodge. Piperton Finance is an overseas company with its Head Office currently based in the British Virgin Islands. The other two landowners within the Village Centre are Gableholt (an overseas company) and the Co-operative Group (Co-op) who also has agents managing their interests.
- 6 On 17 September, Members reached decisions on further steps to be taken by the Council in response to the petition and defined the Council’s future role. Progress in relation to the decisions reached will be set out in this report.

Summary of action taken in response to decisions reached by Cabinet

7 Decision made by Cabinet	Action taken
<p>a) An appropriate communication such as a one off newsletter be used to communicate to local residents what the Council could and couldn’t do and to advertise the twitter feed;</p>	<p>This was sent in November and a copy is attached as Appendix A</p>
<p>b) The Council, in its ongoing discussions with the landowners, to continue to encourage them to respond quickly and appropriately to tenants’ concerns, and that it be noted that it was not appropriate that the Council got directly involved in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • private disputes or issues that relate to business relationships between landowner or their representatives and tenants 	<p>The Community Planning and Projects Officer continues to liaise with the landowners’ representatives and receive information offered. He has been mindful to ensure that the Council is not involved in private issues as resolved by Cabinet.</p>

<p>or leaseholders;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • private disputes between landowners on matters such as service charges 	
<p>c) that the Council’s focus for future involvement in the village be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support and bring forward the regeneration of New Ash Green Village Centre and ensure that the community is engaged in bringing forward any proposals • supporting and facilitating the New Ash Green Town Team • carrying out functions relating to its services including environmental health, building control, licensing and planning development. • continuing to support Community Safety activities such as Environmental Visual Audits and the Community Safety Focus Group. 	<p><i>Support and bring forward the regeneration of New Ash Green...</i></p> <p>The Council’s Community Planning and Projects Officer remains in contact with the landowners’ representatives and has asked for a meeting with the landowners and the Council’s Regeneration Adviser.</p> <p>The Council has been using the tools that it has to secure the regeneration of the village centre. Consultations with local residents were fed into planning policy work on the long term future of the Centre.</p> <p>The Allocation and Development Management Plan identifies New Ash Green as a mixed use regeneration zone with up to 50 enabling units of residential accommodation. This sets the scene to enable the landowner or other developer to apply for planning permission to undertake this regeneration.</p> <p>It has now been confirmed the Richmond Lodge has engaged an architect to produce a master plan for the village centre. It has also been confirmed that the architect has held initial discussions with the Co-op about the master plan.</p> <p><i>Supporting and facilitating the New Ash Green Town Team</i></p> <p>We continue to support the New Ash Green Town Team, particularly on efforts to improve footfall.</p> <p>In addition, a free retail health check was offered to all businesses in New</p>

	<p>Ash Green earlier this year through the West Kent Partnership. No businesses in New Ash Green expressed an interest in taking up the free health check.</p> <p><i>Carrying out functions relating to its services including environmental health, building control, licensing and planning development</i></p> <p>Information is set out in Appendix B</p> <p>Continuing to support Community Safety activities such as Environmental Visual Audits and the Community Safety Focus Group.</p> <p>The Community Safety Manager and the Community Planning and Projects Officer undertook a visit to review and update the Environmental Visual Audit for New Ash Green on 16 March. The results are attached as Appendix C.</p>
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Key Implications

Financial

There are no financial implications for the Council Associated with this report.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

There are no legal implications for the Council associated with this report.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Community Impact and Outcomes

The weight of local feeling expressed in the petition submitted to Council on 21 July is acknowledged. The Council remain fully committed to investigating the issues arising from the petition and to ensure residents are made aware of appropriate information relating to the regeneration.

Conclusions

This report sets out the coordinated action the Council has taken to address concerns within the context of the issues raised by the petition.

The Council will take forward matters relating to the results of the review of the Environmental Visual Audit and will keep S215 notices in respect of the village centre under review, where possible taking further action. Environmental Health continues to review any matters for concern as part of statutory inspections of commercial premises. They will also respond promptly to any further health and safety or hygiene issues raised by Members of the public. In addition, the Council will continue to be alert to and respond urgently to concern raised by businesses, partners or residents in respect of dangerous structures that may pose a risk to public safety.

Appendices

Appendix A - Text included in New Ash Green Village Association Newsletter

Appendix B - Report of functions relating to the Council's services in New Ash Green

Appendix C - Results of the Environmental Visual Audit carried out on 16 March 2016

Lesley Bowles

Chief Officer, Communities & Business