

IMPROVEMENT & INNOVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2021 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Fleming (Chairman)

Cllr. Bayley (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Abraham, Bonin, Clayton, Eyre, Hogarth, McGregor, Nelson, Pett and Waterton

An apology for absence was received from Cllr. Andrews

Cllr. Dickins was present via a virtual media platform, which does not constitute attendance as recognised by the Local Government Act 1972.

12. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Improvement & Innovation Advisory Committee held on 24 June 2021, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

13. Declarations of interest

There were no additional declarations of interest.

14. Actions form previous meeting

There were none.

15. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder, and Chairman advised that there had been minor delays in the redevelopment of White Oak Leisure Centre due to abnormal site conditions encountered. The new leisure centre was due to open in February 2022, a month later than initially planned. The nearby Orchards Academy had experienced flooding following heavy rain. There were plans to continue the improvements programme for the Sports Hall to ensure it opened as close to the opening of White Oak Leisure Centre as possible.

A consulting team for the residential led scheme on the Land East of Bevan Place in Swanley, had been introduced and West Kent Housing were keen to be part of the scheme. The new business hub was currently under construction at 27-37 High Street, Swanley. There were plans to increase the housing density of the proposed White Oak residential site at the location of the former leisure centre.

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There was work to continue looking into projects on Edenbridge Leisure Centre and the Land East of Sevenoaks High Street.

16. Referral from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

17. Budget 2022/23: Review of Service Dashboards and Service Change Impact Assessments (SCIAs)

The Head of Finance presented the report which set out updates to the 2022/23 budget within the existing framework of the 10-year budget and savings plan. The report presented growth and savings/ additional income proposals that had been identified which needed to be considered, and requested further suggestions from Members, before finalising the budget for 2022/23.

Informed by the latest information from Government and discussions with Cabinet, it was proposed that the Council continued to set a revenue budget that assumed no direct funding from Government through the Revenue Support Grant or New Homes Bonus. This would result in the Council continuing to be financially self-sufficient. To achieve this aim and to ensure a balanced budget position over the next 10-year period would continue to be challenging due to the ongoing financial impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, homelessness and inflationary pressures.

The budget process would be the same as two years ago as opposed to the shortened process last year, but streamlining the process in future years was being investigated.

No changes had been made to the assumptions at this stage, and the annual budget gap included in the report was £100,000 which related to the annual savings target. It was expected however, that the gap would increase.

Members discussed the possibility of introducing advertising to the Council's website as an opportunity for income. Whilst advertising on the Council's website did not seem suitable, there were other opportunities to advertise with other Council owned assets.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that the growth proposal identified in Appendices E & F to the report (SCIA 05) (22/23)) applicable to this Advisory Committee, be considered.

18. LGA Peer Challenge

The Assistant Chief Executive presented the report outlining the Council's proposal for a Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge to be held between 29 November 2021 and 1 December 2021. As well as the five core components of the challenge, two further focus areas in housing delivery and regeneration were requested.

The Peer Team would be led by a Chief Executive from another Council and support by a Peer Challenge Manager from the LGA. In addition, the team would include Leaders of other Councils and a Council Director with significant experience in regeneration. Whilst onsite, the Peer Team would meet with Members, Officers, partners and other stakeholders. Where face-to-face sessions would not be possible, remote meetings would be arranged.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

19. Stangrove Estate

The Strategic Head of Property and Commercial set out the report which sought Council's approval for a new capital project to proceed and for provision to be made within the Capital Programme for 13 new homes, a retail unit together with parking and landscaping improvements within the Stangrove Estate in Edenbridge.

The Stangrove estate had several parcels of land which were poorly used, and by developing these sites, the Council would contribute to its housing targets, but also significantly improve the Estate's public realm by providing additional car parking spaces and landscaping improvements to the open spaces. A new community shop would also be provided in response to the local communities wishes. Design and feasibility work, alongside other due diligence studies had been undertaken and a planning application for the development was submitted in August 2021. Subject to planning consent being obtained and funding being finalised it was envisaged that the new scheme would be delivered by Summer 2023.

Members considered the report. Following questions, it was clarified that funding for the scheme would come from external borrowing.

The local Member expressed concerns that the overall number of parking spaces was not a large enough increase and that properties on Greshams Way could potentially be overlooked. However, it was noted that the proposal was considered a significant improvement from the previous one.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

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Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) it be recommended to Council that the capital funding of £4,312,743 be agreed;
- b) it be recommended to Council that the scheme would only progress subject to the funding gap being eliminated and planning permission being obtained, be noted;
- c) it be recommended to Council that, subject to approval of the recommendation (a) the development scheme for 7 sites within Stangrove Park, Edenbridge to provide 7 off-street, communal car parks, a new community shop, improvements to landscaping and 13 residential units at an estimated total project cost of £4, 312,743, as set out within the table above, be agreed; and
- d) subject to approval of recommendation (a) by Council, the Strategic Head of Property and Commercial, following consultation with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Chief Officer Finance & Trading, be delegated authority to enter into necessary contracts for the funding of the scheme and the disposal of the residential and commercial units.

20. Farmstead Drive - Development Proposal

The Strategic Head of Property and Commercial presented the report which sought approval for funding to undertake further feasibility and design work to facilitate the submission of a planning application and to deliver the scheme subject to receiving the necessary statutory consents. The development proposal was for a site located on Farmstead Road, within the Spitals Cross housing estate in Edenbridge. As this was a new capital project that was not accounted for in the Capital Programme 2020/21, and the estimated project budget, Council approval was required.

The estate was built in the 1960s, and as such the community buildings that currently occupied the proposed development site were at the end of their economic life or required substantial refurbishment. There was the opportunity to redevelop and re-provide the community hall and its facilities and to replace the shop with modern premises, to provide new housing and public open space and parking. The sale of the residential accommodation would provide capital receipts to pay for these improvements.

Members asked questions of clarification, and were advised that local residents would be consulted following approval of the scheme from Full Council.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

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Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) it be recommended to Council that, the provision of £7,609,620 in the 2021/22 Capital Programme to deliver the scheme within the financial implications, detailed as (i) to (vi) below, be agreed;
- b)
 - i. The scheme be intended to be funded (ultimately) from capital receipts from the sale of residential units in the scheme;
 - ii. A summary of the estimated scheme funding, based on feasibility to date;
 - iii. 23 residential units would be disposed of in the open market and according to the Council's property consultant, which were expected to generate a sales receipt of £8.143m. The affordable housing units were expected to generate £1.172m and would be discounted to reflect development costs and were in line with current market practice for affordable housing;
 - iv. Until receipts from the sales of the residential units were received, short-term external borrowing be used to fund the scheme. Potential financing costs were detailed within paragraph 18 of the report;
 - v. The new retail unit would be retained by the Council, and let on market terms. The Community Hall be leased to reflect community benefit, but also to ensure future on-going liabilities be recuperated; and
 - vi. Consideration be given to the VAT implications of the project, dependant on the use of some of the elements of the project may require specific VAT treatment and further VAT advice be sought.
- c) subject to approval, of recommendation (a) by Council, authority be delegated to the Strategic Head of Property and Commercial and the Chief Officer Finance & Trading, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance & Investments to proceed with the Scheme subject to final scheme viability; and
- d) subject to approval of recommendation (a) by Council, authority be delegated to the Strategic Head of Property and Commercial following consultation with the Chief Officer Finance and Trading and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to submit a planning application and to enter into any necessary contracts to facilitate the development and construction of the proposed scheme in accordance with the Council's Contracts Procedure Rules and for the disposal of the residential and commercial units.

21. Work plan

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The work plan was noted with the addition of a presentation on the Residents Survey at the next meeting on 25 November 2021.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.53 PM

CHAIRMAN