

MEETING POINT UPDATE

Improvement and Innovation Advisory Committee - 27 June 2023)

Report of: Detlev Munster, Strategic Head of Property and Commercial

Status: For Information

Also considered by: None

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: This report provides an update on the redevelopment of 27-37 High Street, Swanley. The building project recently achieved practical completion and has delivered 17 new homes and a business hub, known as Meeting Point.

This report supports the Key Aim of: supporting our local economy.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Julia Thornton

Contact Officer: Detlev Munster, Ext. 7099

Recommendation to Improvement and Innovation Advisory Committee:

To note the delivery of 17 new affordable homes and a new business hub in Swanley

Reason for recommendation: To provide an update on the delivery of this significant capital project.

Introduction and Background

- 1 In May 2020, the Council achieved planning permission for the redevelopment of 27-37 High Street to incorporate 17 new homes, a 250sq.m business hub, parking and a new garden.
- 2 The Council was successful in applying for a £1.49m grant from Getting Building Fund which enabled the project's delivery and a contractor was appointed by March 2021.

- 3 The construction programme experienced numerous set-backs primarily associated with poor delivery performance by third parties, such as the statutory utility providers. For example, substation works undertaken by UK Power Network failed commissioning and works needed to be rescheduled causing significant delays to our contractor. Similar issues were also experienced with BT and Thames Water. As part of the Council's project management process, a detailed closure report will be prepared highlighting key lessons.
- 4 Practical completion was achieved in June 2023 and is within the established budget set by Council (c.£6.1m). Appendix A provides photos of the scheme.
- 5 While construction work took place, the disposal strategy for the residential units was agreed and it was decided to transfer 17 new homes to Quercus Housing. This transaction is due to complete by the end of June allowing occupation of the new homes in July. The Housing Team is currently finalising the allocation of these units to households on the Council's housing waiting list.
- 6 Further work was also undertaken with getting the business hub operationally fit. In this regard:
 - a new hub manager and a new hub assistant were recruited
 - a draft business plan was prepared and updated
 - a draft communications and marketing plan was prepared and updated
 - a branding strategy was prepared
 - a new dedicated website was launched
 - a pricing strategy was adopted
 - hire agreements were drafted
 - Fittings, furniture and equipment was agreed and purchased
 - Relationships were established with key business support organisations
 - A business support programme (funded by the UKSPF and delivered by Smarter Society) was established and launched under the West Kent Partnership banner
 - Other UKSPF and REPF programmes will also be accessible to Meeting Point users.
- 7 Meeting Point was established to support SMEs and entrepreneurs with the development and growth of their businesses. It provides conveniently located co-working spaces in Swanley, which also fulfils the Council's key priority in supporting its town centres and their high streets.
- 8 Meeting Point's co-working space includes:
 - Three dedicated offices
 - 15 dedicated workspaces
 - 9 "hot-desks"
 - Meeting room

- Informal meeting break-out areas
- Event space

9 Further information about Meeting Point can be found in Appendix B.

10 Meeting Point opened its doors to the public on the 05 June 2023, with two offices already having been snapped-up and the occupation of the third office and two permanent workstations currently being finalised.

11 A detailed marketing campaign has now commenced.

Other options Considered and/or rejected

12. Not applicable to this report.

Key Implications

Financial

13. Not applicable to this report.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

14. Not applicable to this report.

Equality Assessment

15. Not applicable to this report.

Net Zero Implications

16. The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the Council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district, or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

Conclusions

17. Construction of the 27-37 High Street project has now completed and the project enters its closure and operational phase. In particular, it enters the defects and liabilities period for one year during which period all defects etc are noted and will require the contractor to attend to these matters.

18. The new build has also been successfully commissioned and despite the delays, was achieved within budget.

19. Meeting Point has also been successfully commissioned and is now operational and will provide much needed business support to local businesses and entrepreneurs.

Appendices

Appendix A - Photos

Appendix B - Meeting Point Welcome Pack

Background Papers

None.

Detlev Munster
Strategic Head of Property and Commercial