

ECONOMY REGENERATION & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 29 September 2021

Present: Councillor T Jones (Chair)

Councillors K Greaney A Hodson
T Smith C Povall
G Wood D Mitchell
D Burgess-Joyce E Gleaves
A Gardner J Bird (In place of P Martin)

23 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair opened the meeting and reminded everyone that the meeting was being webcast and a copy is retained on the Council's website.

24 APOLOGIES

Councillor Paul Martin gave apologies for absence and was deputised by Councillor Jo Bird.

25 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests and any other relevant interest and to state the nature of the interest. There were no declarations of interests.

26 MINUTES

**Resolved (by assent) –
That the minutes of the meeting of Economy, Regeneration and Development Committee held on 26 July 2021 be approved and adopted as a correct record.**

With the assent of the Committee, the Chair brought forward item 9 (Dominick House Liscard) so that it would be considered immediately after item 4 (Statements and Petitions), as the items were linked.

27 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were two questions from members of the Birkenhead Market Traders Association.

Question 1 from David French

At a meeting of 10 August Mr Evans informed our community representatives that the decision has been made to scrap plans for a temporary Market, that our community will remain on the current market site and furthermore no demolition/redevelopment work will be commenced anywhere on the current market site. When does Wirral Borough Council expect demolition reconstruction to begin?

Answer to question 1.

As discussed with me as Chair and a number of members of the Market Traders Association Committee on 10th of September 2021, we are revisiting our plans for a temporary market solution and responding to traders' feedback. We are now working towards having just one move, to a permanent-only offer. At this meeting, we discussed that we would not be able to share further details at that point but would be in a stronger position in the following 4 to 5 weeks to outline the council position. We are still working to secure a permanent option so we are not yet able to update on when the move to a permanent market will take place or the subsequent date for demolition of the current market.

Question 2 from Bernard Furlong, read out by David French.

Our community have been informed via newsletter that the vacant Marks & Spencer site proposal has been revisited and examined by WBC Officers and rejected. As this proposal has been rejected by Officers we do not see that any information can be classed as commercially sensitive. Therefore will WBC Officers furnish our representatives with copies of all documents pertaining to the Marks & Spencer site held by WBC without delay?

Answer to question 2.

All information held by the Council appertaining to the Marks and Spencer unit on Borough Pavements is commercially sensitive and was provided by the owners of the shopping centre under the restrictions of a non-disclosure agreement. It is not possible for the Council to disclose any of this information.

Supplementary question to question 2

Currently we have the Market Manager who is going round site telling tenants that Wirral Borough Council will not support our move if we do decide to move to the Marks and Spencer's site ourself. Is this the point of the Wirral Borough Council or the Market Manager's personal opinion?

Answer to supplementary question to question 2

The Council has concerns about the potential for undermining the future of Birkenhead Market in the event that it granted additional rights to a second town centre market. Wirral Council has recently shared with traders its proposals for a new purpose built modern market within the town and looks forward to working with existing and new traders to develop these proposals

further. It does not therefore support a relocated market into the former Marks and Spencer building. That said should a consortium wish to establish a new independent concern then they will be required to apply through a market licence application process in accordance with the Markets Policy. Any such application will be evaluated on a number of set characteristics by a regulatory panel and as custodian of the market charter, the Council has the right to approve or refuse or any proposals for markets that fall within its Charter area. All applications made to the regulatory panel are assessed independently so individuals can therefore not comment on whether an application may or may not be approved.

28 STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS

There was one statement from Roger Lee in respect of the Dominick house report.

My name is Roger Lee, I am a chartered town planning consultant and have acted as a consultant on behalf of Prospect Estates Ltd for a number of years on a range of development projects, including outline and full planning applications, planning appeals and prior approval applications.

I submitted the prior approval applications on Prospect's behalf for the change of use of Dominick House to residential units, comprising three separate applications – one for 45 units, one for 50 units and one for 70 units, all of which were approved by the council. The reason for the variation in unit numbers is to give maximum flexibility relating to what the ultimate demand may be for occupation of the building.

As a starting point to demonstrate the compatibility of Prospect's proposals with the aspirations of the Council, Dominick House is included in the draft Liscard Masterplan for refurbishment and redevelopment to bring it back into an active use with the primary aim for it to be a residential use, although the Masterplan advises of a preference for a more interactive use of the ground floor rather than wholesale residential, which is what the current planning approvals are for.

Prospect Estates are agreeable to a non-residential use of the ground floor and last year entered into discussions with the Citizens Advice Bureau who had expressed an interest in occupying the ground floor of the building. Unfortunately, due to the ongoing delays in reaching an agreement with the council the CAB have now secured alternative premises.

Prospect and the council have been in discussions over the freehold of the building since May last year and until the turn of the year those discussions were progressing positively with an understanding that the council wished to progress with an agreement with Prospect without delay.

Unfortunately, that position has subsequently changed and the council now appears to wish to take a considerably longer period of time to explore its options and have linked this to the unknown future at this stage of the Cherry Tree Shopping Centre.

With respect though, Prospect's proposals align with those in the draft Master Plan and there is no need to delay the negotiations on the freehold interest as the current position with Dominick House does not have any negative effect on the overall long-term aspirations for Liscard.

Prospect Estates is a longstanding experienced property and development company. It has carried out a number of similar developments in recent years in the north of the country – in Accrington, in Stockport, in Bolton, in Barnsley, and in Sunderland – building out residential conversions and securing much needed high quality residential occupation for people living in those areas. This is its simple aspiration for Dominick House and I would urge you to support the company's proposals to acquire the freehold interest and bring this building forward for development which will have a considerable and positive impact in terms of the regeneration of the centre.

The Chair thanked Mr Lee for his representations and assured him that his comments would be taken into account by members during their consideration of item 9 (Dominick House Liscard).

29 **QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS**

There were no questions by Members.

30 **DOMINICK HOUSE, LISCARD**

David Armstrong, Assistant Chief Executive, presented this report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which provided background to matters relating to Dominick House and informed members of current discussions with the leaseholder. Selling of the freehold had been agreed by Cabinet but the Council had been cautious about the selling over concerns about the management of the building and about the type of residential community that could result.

Resolved - That the current position with respect to matters relating to Dominick House, Liscard be noted.

31 **LIVEABLE NEIGHBOURHOODS**

Sally Shah, Assistant Director and Chief Regeneration Officer, introduced the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which sought approval for officers to work with Sustrans, the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) and local stakeholders to co-develop and design a 'Liveable Neighbourhood' in Bebington, and to produce a business case which could be used to secure future funding to be used to deliver the required infrastructure. A Liveable Neighbourhood would prioritise people over cars and encourage active travel. Any permanent infrastructure proposals would be subject to a further report to Committee.

Members queried the selection of area and it was explained that the areas was selected based on numerous criteria such as car ownership and number of schools and also reflected issues raised by residents and members in recent years in relation to traffic speeds and rat running.

Resolved – That

- (1) the Director of Regeneration and Place, in consultation with the Director of Neighbourhood Services, be authorised to work with Sustrans and local stakeholders, including schools and residents, to co-develop and design a Liveable Neighbourhood (incorporating a school neighbourhood cluster) in Bebington, and to produce a business case which could be used to secure future funding;**
- (2) the Director of Regeneration and Place, in consultation with the Director of Neighbourhood Services, Chair and Spokespersons of the Economy, Regeneration and Development Committee and the Chair and Spokespersons of Environment, Transport and Climate Change Committee, be authorised to implement any temporary test/trial schemes which arise from the stakeholder co-development programme; and**
- (3) a further report be brought forward to Members for approval of the business case, the submission of any funding application and installation of any permanent Liveable Neighbourhoods infrastructure.**

32 MASS TRANSIT

Sally Shah, Assistant Director and Chief Regeneration Officer, introduced the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which provided an update regarding the business case development which has been undertaken to date for the delivery of a mass transit system in Wirral and sought approval for Wirral Mass Transit Phase A to be included in the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Bus Service Improvement Plan submission in October 2021. The plan was to introduce a system based upon 'Glider' hydrogen powered buses as an interim to move away from car usage as a permanent system was developed within the Wirral Waters development and active travel opportunities were developed.

Members debated the options of vehicles, costs and established that:

- investment in the system should improve infrastructure ready for the permanent system but also allowed flexibility
- Having infrastructure in place within the Wirral Waters developments would maximise the investment in it and would demonstrate demand
- Merseytravel would operate the system to link with the wider public transport network
- A Members workshop to discuss issues in detail would be useful

- Developments in vehicles such as fuels and reducing debris from tyres would be monitored and included if possible

Resolved - That:

- (1) the progress made in the development of the Wirral Mass Transit business case to date be noted, and a further report be brought forward to a future meeting of this committee following completion of the business case work in early 2022; and
- (2) the Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to work with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to include Wirral Mass Transit Network Phase A in Lorca's Bus Service Improvement Plan submission to the Department for Transport in October 2021.

33 PROPERTY DISPOSALS

David Armstrong, Assistant Chief Executive, presented the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which sought approval for the disposal of three of the Council's property assets which were no longer required for operational needs.

Members queried some details of the proposals to ensure they were clear on the extent of the disposals.

Resolved – That Policy and Resources Committee be recommended to approve that:

- (1) 27 Balls Road, Oxton, be declared surplus to requirements and authority be given to the Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place, to arrange for its marketing by auction and subsequent sale on the terms described in paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3. of the report;
- (2) Plymyard Cemetery Lodge, 996 New Chester Road, Eastham, be declared surplus to requirements and authority be given to the Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place, to arrange for its marketing through a local estate agency on the terms described in paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5. of the report;
- (3) In the event that a sale of Plymyard Cemetery Lodge through an estate agency is not achieved expeditiously, the Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place, be authorised to arrange for its marketing by auction and subsequent sale on the terms described in paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5. of the report;
- (4) The Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to secure the

sale of the Laser Engineering Centre to the current tenant, for £340,000 (excluding VAT) plus fees of £1,500

34 **SALE OF LAND AT CROSS LANE, WALLASEY**

David Armstrong, Assistant Chief Executive, presented the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which sought approval for a recommendation to be made to Policy and Resources Committee for the disposal of land at Cross Lane, Wallasey to enable West Wallasey Van Hire to meet its expansion needs and to generate a capital receipt.

Members questioned the proposal and expressed concerns at the use of the land, the increased traffic and the loss of green space and flood plain in the locality.

Councillor Andrew Hodson proposed that the land not be sold at this time. This was seconded by Councillor David Burgess-Joyce and supported unanimously.

**Resolved – That
the site edged red in Appendix 1 to the report, at Cross Lane, Wallasey, not be declared surplus to Council requirements and not be sold at this time.**

35 **QUARTER 1 MONITOR REPORT**

Peter Molyneux, Senior Finance Manager, presented this report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which provided a summary of the projected year-end revenue and capital position as at the end of Quarter 1 (June 2021) of the 2021/22 financial year.

Resolved – That -

- (1) the projected year-end revenue forecast variance of £0.02m favourable position as reported at quarter 1 (Apr-Jun) of 2021-22 be noted;**
- (2) progress on the achievement of approved savings and the projected year-end forecast position at quarter 1 (Apr-Jun) of 2021-22 be noted;**
- (3) the reserves allocated to the Committee for future one-off commitments be noted; and**
- (4) the projected year-end capital forecast expenditure position of £17.5m as reported at quarter 1 (Apr-Jun) of 2021-22 be noted.**

36 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Economy, Regeneration and Development Committee was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. This work

programme was to align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which are within the remit of the Committee.

Resolved – That the content of the Economy, Regeneration and Development Committee work programme for the remainder of the 2021/22 municipal year, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

37 **EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Resolved – That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The Public Interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.

38 **HIND STREET REGENERATION**

Sally Shah, Assistant Director and Chief Regeneration Officer, introduced the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which provided an update regarding the collaboration work being undertaken by the Hind Street Major Landowner Group. The proposals supported the Birkenhead Wirral Waters plans and had a range of potential delivery options.

Members supported the proposals as good value for money.

**Resolved –
That the recommendations in the report be approved.**

39 **HIND STREET MOVEMENT STRATEGY**

Sally Shah, Assistant Director and Chief Regeneration Officer, introduced the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which provided an update regarding the work undertaken to develop a movement strategy to mitigate the impact of the removal of the 2 flyovers in Birkenhead.

**Resolved (10 for, none against, one abstention) –
That approval in principle be given that construction of a new link road between Rock Retail Park and central Birkenhead be completed in advance of the closure of the Birkenhead flyovers.**