

ECONOMY REGENERATION & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Monday, 22 November 2021

Present: Councillor T Jones (Chair)

Councillors K Greaney A Gardner
P Martin A Hodson
T Smith C Povall
G Wood D Mitchell
D Burgess-Joyce E Gleaves

48 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 for two years.

49 APOLOGIES

No apologies received

50 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

51 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 November, 2021, be approved and adopted as a correct record subject to an amendment to page 3 of the minute pack.

The Chair noted that he had requested a standing item on future agendas, however, the draft minutes state that he suggested it.

52 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

52.1 Public Questions

Member of the Birkenhead Market Tenants Association submitted several questions.

1. William Featherstone on behalf of the Birkenhead Market Tenants Association.

On 22 October Birkenhead Market Tenants Association wrote to The Director of Regeneration and Place with our community's urgent proposal for a low funding reorganisation of the current market. Our aim is to create a void in the centre of the Market, rearrange stalls towards the perimeter and give the impression of a fuller market, improving the markets look and function. We have received no email response to this urgent proposal from any Council Officer, either positive or negative.

Our proposal involves lots of meaningful consultations with members of our community with a view to helping some members relocate. To keep costs to an absolute minimum we propose recycling existing wall panels, boarding and security shutters to block off the voided area within the market. These blocked areas will be camouflaged by stall holders displays.

We have consulted widely with our community and they have expressed a great deal of interest in this project.

To help progress our proposal we need to offer the impacted retailers the maximum choice of new locations.

We requested rental prices for vacant stalls within the market from the Market Manager.

He initially refused to divulge this public realm information stating it was confidential information and data protected.

We raised a petition and eventually the Market Manager released inflated rental prices for the vacant stalls.

Why is the Market Manager issuing suddenly inflated rental prices on vacant stalls to existing tenants?

Answer:

The pricing released is consistent with the average tenancy in the market and the open market value for the stalls. It is therefore not considered to be an inflated price

A supplemental question was asked querying the Council's rental proposals for G28 and G29 and the Chair indicated that he would provide a written response.

2. William Featherstone on behalf of Birkenhead Market Tenants Association.

Market Budget & Expenditure

As a community of responsible businesswomen and men, the Birkenhead Market Tenants Association (BMTA) are very aware of the financial pressures placed on Wirral Borough Council. Recent examples of market spending that many in our community have question include ...

Assistance for the Market Manager £35,000.00

At the recent Policy and Resources Committee reference was made to extra support being secured to assist the Market Manager.

Our community question the need for yet another assistant for the market manager.

There are more market staff than ever and yet there are less cleaners and security, even the security cameras aren't monitored.

We consider that Wirral Borough Council should start an immediate review of market staffing, job functions and salaries.

Advertising £40,000.00 ?

The BMTA have had little consultation concerning the advertising budget, we are informed after money is spent, not before.

Advertising includes radio station advertising on a station that none of our customers appear to listen to.

Many members of our community feel this advertising is badly targeted and they would've preferred the money was spent after the urgent reorganisation of stalls.

Gazebos £40,000.00

Forty gazebos purchased for the Mini Market proposal. The gazebos were ordered even though the Mini Market was never approved by this Committee. They sit in storage within the market untouched.

CBRE Consultation £12,000.00

A redundant consultation once it was decided that the market would stay where it is.

Grand Total £127,000.00

We accept £127,000 may be a small amount to WBC when committees talk about millions. But it is important to our community that £127,000 is spent wisely and we wish to assist WBC by offering to jointly monitor the market budget with management. Our aim being to avoid any unnecessary spending in our community's name.

Will Wirral Borough Council allow our community representatives to participate in market budget decisions before monies are spent with a view to reducing unnecessary expenditure?

Answer

Thank you for your question, which I will answer in two parts.

In answer to your question as to whether BMTA representatives could participate in market budget decisions, it is not always possible to share budget information due its sensitive nature, also where grant funding has been received this will come with specific requirements as to what it can be used for.

In regard to your second question, the Christmas Marketing Campaign (market) is funded by the Welcome Back Fund for COVID Safety with a spend deadline of March 2021 and with clear eligibility criteria.

However, officers are committed to discussing ideas and plans with the BMTA and welcome input into these.

William Featherstone queried if a further question could be sent via email. The Chair confirmed he would be happy to receive and respond to any questions

3. William Featherstone

Any member of the public can ask for the rental price of a vacant stall in Birkenhead Market. The Birkenhead Market Tenants Association had to raise a petition to get the market manager to release rental information. Is the Market Manager under instruction to obstruct the Birkenhead Market Tenants Association.

Answer

The Council has provided the detail requested and is committed to the market and ensuring it remains a focus of the town centre of Birkenhead in all aspects of the current and future plans. The decision to release the information was not based on the petition received (of which you had 26 signatures) but with a view to collaborating with the association for mutual benefit.

A supplemental question was asked querying the Council's rental proposals for G28 and G29 and a response will be provided in due course.

52.2 Statements and Petitions

There were no statements or petitions received.

52.3 Questions by Members

No questions from Members were received

53 TOWN DEAL - ACCEPTANCE OF GRANT

The Assistant Director: Chief Regeneration Officer introduced the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place. Members of the Committee were informed that on 15 July 2021, the Council received notification of the outcome of a submission it had made to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC Town Deal Programme).

This announcement set out that the Council had been invited to enter into a Town Deal for Birkenhead, up to a value of £25,000,000. This 'in principle' award was offered subject to the successful completion and approval of businesses cases for the projects included in the bid submission. Both the Council and DLUHC had agreed the Heads of Terms.

The report set out the next steps with Members asked to give consideration to the tight time scales, as well as agreeing to delegate a number of decisions to the Director of Regeneration and Place in terms of accepting the grant and commencing activity to develop and deliver the Town Deal for Birkenhead.

Councillor Emily Gleaves queried how the activities being funded at Egerton House would align with those being progressed at Start Yard. The Assistant Director: Chief Regeneration Officer confirmed that activities would be complementary. This was followed by a question from Councillor Burgess-Joyce who queried in terms of the 5% upfront payment if it was a non-refundable amount and whether it would be lost if not spent. The Assistant Director: Chief Regeneration Officer commented to say that this was her understanding.

The Director of Regeneration and Place also confirmed that Town Deal Board decisions would be referred back to the Committee unless they were within the scope of a delegated officer decision making.

Resolved -

That Policy and Resources Committee be recommended to approve the following recommendations:

- (1) Note the content of the report and the announcement from Government regarding the Town Deal funding award in relation to Birkenhead;**
- (2) Note the re-profiling of the funding allocation for projects as set out in paragraph 3.8 of this report;**

- (3) Authorise the Director of Regeneration and Place to accept the offer and funding from DLUHC, via a grant made under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003;**
- (4) Authorise the Director of Regeneration and Place to progress delivery of the Town Deal Programme, in line with the Section 31 Grant and the Town Investment Plan, and to implement a change control process (if required);**
- (5) Authorise the Director of Regeneration and Place to allocate the Town Deal pre-development funding of £1,250,000 (5% of the total award) on receipt;**
- (6) Authorise the Director of Resources as S151 Officer to review and approve business cases, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place, and submit the results to DLUHC in order to release the remaining funds; and**
- (7) Authorise the Director of Law and Governance in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place and the Director of Resources to enter into any necessary agreements or other legal documentation to implement the above recommendations**
- (8) the above recommendations**

54 **ECONOMIC STRATEGY FOR WIRRAL TO 2026**

The Assistant Director: Chief Regeneration Officer introduced the report which provided details of a new Economic Strategy for Wirral.

The Wirral Plan: A 2020 Vision set out a shared partnership vision to improve outcomes for Wirral residents, supported by a Growth Plan which translated Wirral's ambitions for economic growth into a clear direction of travel.

Over the five years of the Growth Plan, significant progress had been made in positioning Wirral as a place to live, work, visit and invest.

A new strategy, a Wirral Plan 2021 - 2026, had been developed to provide a set of goals and objectives for the Council and its partners to work to until 2026

Alongside this, the Birkenhead 2040 Framework was being developed to support a transformational regeneration programme along the 'Left Bank' of the River Mersey stretching from New Brighton to Bromborough, with a particular focus on the creation of a sustainable, waterfront urban garden community in Birkenhead. This was one of the largest and most ambitious regeneration programmes in the UK with the potential to create up to 20,000 new homes over the next 20 years through a radical re-use of neglected and brownfield sites, underpinned by the emerging Local Plan.

Members queried if there was a separate strategy to attract inward investment to the area.

The Director of Regeneration and Place commented that part of his remit was to ensure a supply of suitable accommodation for businesses interested in sites in Wirral. Previously there had been a deficit of Grade A premises, but new office space would be going live late in 2021. In terms of Wirral Waters, this was being de-risked and overlaid in terms of a range of projects and initiatives including the Freeport designation and the Maritime Knowledge Hub project which involved local universities and the maritime accelerator project. A workshop was suggested to discuss this in more detail.

Councillor Karl Greaney queried how the project would be monitored. The AD: Chief Regeneration Officer confirmed this would be critical to the success and regular reports would be brought back to committee to ensure there is sufficient oversight and monitoring.

The Chair advised Members that he had requested the director seriously consider a single point of contact for this project, to avoid any speculative contact.

Resolved –

That the Wirral Economic Strategy 2021 - 2026, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

55 **LISCARD NEIGHBOURHOOD FRAMEWORK: AN INTEGRATED MASTERPLAN**

The Assistant Director: Chief Regeneration Officer introduced the report which provided details of a new Neighbourhood Framework for Liscard: An Integrated Masterplan.

The Council commissioned BDP, supported by Aspinall Verdi and Curtis, to produce a long-term framework for Liscard in March 2020. The framework was intended to provide an ambitious vision and strategic context to drive forward and guide the sustainable economic growth and renewal of Liscard over the following 15 years.

The Neighbourhood Framework had been funded through the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Town Centre Fund, which aimed to support the viability and vitality of town centres. In addition to the Neighbourhood Framework, the funding was being used to support a range of interventions. These included the diversification of activity to bring vacant premises back into use, public realm and street scene improvements, and a number of community projects.

The AD: Chief Regeneration Officer took Members questions and noted their concerns around Liscard being dwarfed by projects in Birkenhead and Liverpool. She responded to say that this was a distinctive offer and a key piece of the Wirral left bank project.

Members commented to state that they were pleased the project was moving forward and queried the mass transit and active travel options for the area. The AD: Chief Regeneration Officer stated that work was progressing on the initial phases of mass transit and the process would be iterative. There were outline plans in terms of the cycling network which were currently under consultation.

Resolved -

That the Liscard Neighbourhood Framework: An Integrated Masterplan, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved as the Council's regeneration strategy for Liscard.

56 **ACQUISITION OF FORMER CO-OP BUILDING - 100 NEW CHESTER ROAD, NEW FERRY**

The Assistant Director for Special Projects introduced the report which sought approval for a recommendation to be made to Policy and Resources Committee for the purchase of the former Co-op building ("The Property") in New Ferry as a strategic acquisition to support the delivery of the master plan for the area. The regeneration of the town centre was a priority for the Council following the explosion in March 2017.

Councillor David Mitchell asked for assurance that any future building on the site would be complementary to area, noting that the architecture in Port Sunlight contributed to the visitor economy. The Assistant Director assured Members that high quality design is essential to the project.

Councillor Andrew Gardner queried the valuation of £700k and asked why the Council were looking to pay this, when the premises had failed to sell in the open market. The Assistant Director advised that the original asking price was £1.5 Million and if acquired with the adjacent site there would in valuation terms be a 'marriage value.'

Councillor Cherry Povall asked for an approximate time scale, noting the poor condition of the site. The Assistant Director advised that if the plot is secured the Council would demolish the building upon acquisition.

Members then further discussed the valuation and asked about the possibilities of an additional valuation.

The Chair noted that whilst the Committee wanted to support the People of New Ferry, it was not an unreasonable request a second valuation and a further report be brought back to committee.

Resolved –

That a second valuation of the former Co-op building - 100 New Chester Road, New Ferry be undertaken and an updated report brought back to Committee in January 2022

57 **EXMOUTH STREET, SEAMUS O'DONNELLS**

The Assistant Chief Executive introduced a report on behalf of the Director of Regeneration and Place, which sought approval for a recommendation to be made to Policy and Resources Committee to dispose of the Council's freehold interest in land at Exmouth Street, Birkenhead to the existing lessee that holds a ground lease of the site and owns the operational public house which is sited thereon.

Councillor Andrew Hodson confirmed he did not have an objection to the sale in principle, and Councillor Paul Martin queried whether the valuation was recent.

Councillor Martin suggested that the current value could be subject to an uplift due to the regeneration work currently being undertaken in Birkenhead and suggested deferring the decision until a valuation could be produced.

The Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that it was a recent valuation and reminded Members that the Council have possession of the site but only retains freehold interest. The Director of Regeneration and Place also advised Members that Council valuers had given proper consideration to the freehold value and other comparable information. Members were also asked to note the recent reports by DLUHC regarding the need for disposal of assets. He also raised the potential for a backlog should any asset disposal reports be referred back for additional valuations.

The Assistant Chief Executive stated that he would be happy to facilitate a workshop to explain the process of valuation in more detail. He stated that the Council had invited auditors to review land disposal practices and they were found to be appropriate.

Councillor David Burgess-Joyce confirmed that assurance was needed and that there should not be a rush to dispose of Assets over the coming months. Councillor Emily Gleaves asked officers if it would be possible to bring three different valuations when presenting asset disposal reports to committee.

The Chair, Councillor Tony Jones reminded Members the cost of any additional valuations would be deducted from the overall sale value. The Director of Regeneration and Place expressed caution and the need to move quickly in regard to asset disposals. He advised that a RICS Registered Valuer 'red book' valuation does cost the Council a significant sum and seeking further valuations would be at a cost and may cause a backlog, however he noted that if further assurance is needed then officers may need to give further consideration to the process.

Resolved –

That Policy and Resources Committee be recommended to approve that:

(1) The freehold interest of land at Exmouth Street, Birkenhead, (which is held via a ground lease with 56 years unexpired and occupied by an operational public house with a grassed area to one side), be declared surplus to the Council's requirements; and

(2) Authorisation be given to the Director of Law & Governance, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration & Place to dispose the property to the current lessee, JSM Company Group Ltd for a price of £120,000, plus payment of the Council's legal costs.

58 **PUBLIC HEALTH ANNUAL REPORT 2020/2021**

The Director of Public Health introduced the Public Health Annual Report which was the independent annual report and a statutory requirement.

The 2020/2021 Report described enduring health inequalities in Wirral, the immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these differences in health outcomes and set out recommendations to improve everyone's health.

The Public Health Annual Report was an important vehicle to identify key issues, flag up problems, report progress and inform local inter agency action.

The 2020/2021 Report sought to direct action that needed to be taken to reduce the impact of health inequalities on Wirral's residents and improve health for everyone in the borough. The Director of Public Health noted Members concerns on this, as well as educational attainment levels and suggested that is a subject which needed redressing and reviewing with a system wide focus.

Resolved – that the recommendations detailed within the Public Health Annual Report 2020/21 be endorsed.

59 **QUARTER 2 MONITOR REPORT**

The Senior Finance Manager introduced the report which provided a summary of the projected year-end revenue and capital position for Economy, Regeneration & Development Committee as at the end of Quarter 2 (September 2021) of the 2021/22 financial year.

The report provided Members with an overview of budget performance to enable the Committee to take ownership of their specific budgets and provide robust challenge and scrutiny to Officers on the performance of those budgets. The Committee was accountable for ensuring that the committee budgets remained within the relevant envelope and would take collective responsibility via the Policy and Resources Committee to ensure that the whole Council budget remained in balance at all times, by agreeing mitigating actions to bring the budget back in line, should a deficit be forecast.

Councillor David Mitchell queried the Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service and a managed cost return for this. Councillor Mitchell also queried the cost of IT within the directorate.

The Director of Regeneration and Place confirmed that the service level agreement was being revived. In regard to the IT query, the Senior Finance Manager confirmed that the IT costs were to ensure that the infrastructure in building control was updated and included training. Members were assured that this would ensure savings could be made by harmonising the systems and the Director of Regen and Place advised he would update on the current status of the project.

Resolved – That

(1). Note the projected year-end revenue forecast variance of £0.128m favourable position as reported at quarter 2 (Jul_Sep) of 2021-22.

(2). Note progress on the achievement of approved savings and the projected year end forecast position at quarter 2 (Jul_Sep) of 2021-22.

(3). Note the reserves allocated to the Committee for future one-off commitments

(4). Note the projected year-end capital forecast expenditure position of £17.649m as reported at quarter 2 (Jul_Sep) of 2021-22.

60 **BUDGET WORKSHOPS OUTCOME REPORT 2022-23**

The Director of Regeneration and Place introduced the report which noted feedback and outcomes from the Budget Workshops which had been held in 2021. The workshops enabled officer and Member liaison on proposed budget options, to facilitate discussion and allow direction to be obtained on further analysis required. The Budget Workshops also provided an opportunity for alternative proposals to be considered. The Policy and Service Committees were responsible for those services being delivered under their operational

headings within their annual budget envelope. The Policy and Resources Committee, in consultation with the respective Policy and Service Committees, had been charged by Council to formulate a draft Medium Term Financial Plan and a budget to recommend to the Council.

The Director of Regeneration and Place advised members that the focus was more on income generation opportunities than savings. Because of the recent assurance reports from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, he was awaiting further information on income targets and would update Members as soon as he had received information.

The Chair asked for assurance that any budget savings would not impact on regeneration opportunities.

Resolved – That the Budget Workshop feedback and outcomes, as detailed in appendix 1, be reported to Policy and Resources Committee for consideration.

61 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Chair introduced the work programme update. The Economy, Regeneration and Development Committee, in co-operation with the other Policy and Service Committees, was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme.

Councillor Emily Gleaves noted that the Temporary Market item was duplicated and asked that this be updated.

Members of the Committee also queried the addition of a Legal Services performance report to the work programme and the Lead Principal Lawyer assured Members that a performance dashboard was being produced with input from officers from the regeneration directorate and this would be presented to Committee at its meeting in January 2021. He indicated that he would share a working version of this document with the Chair and Spokespersons of this Committee in December 2021.

Resolved – That content of the Economy, Regeneration and Development Committee work programme for the remainder of the 2021/22 municipal year be approved.