



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 17 September 2020

SPECIAL ECONOMY SCRUTINY PANEL

7th July 2020 at 6.30 p.m.

Present:

Councillor Furneaux (in the Chair)

Councillors Barfield, Cairns, Freeston (substitute for Callison), Harness, Hasthorpe, Sheridan and Wilson

Commented [PW(1)]: Assume this is correct Anne, just that Freeston isn't ticked as being there on the register on the S drive

Officers in attendance:

- Anne Campbell (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Damien Jaines-White (Acting Assistant Director Regeneration)
- Simon Jones (Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer)
- Claire Bradbury (Development and Regeneration Officer - Engie)
- Karen Goodwin (Lead Investment Officer)
- Paul Windley (Democratic and Scrutiny Team Manager)

Also in attendance:

- Councillor Fenty (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Skills and Housing)
- Councillor Jackson (Leader of the Council and with overall Cabinet responsibility for the Town Deal)
- Councillor S Swinburn (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport)
- Simon Hope (Montagu Evans Limited, Consultant)
- David Tuck (Genecon Limited, Consultant)

SPE.16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from this meeting were received from Councillor Callison.

SPE.17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received in respect of any item on the agenda for this meeting.

SPE.18 FUTURE HIGH STREET FUNDING APPLICATION

The panel considered a report from the Leader of the Council outlining a proposed transformational regeneration scheme to revitalise Grimsby Town Centre. Members noted the report would be considered by Cabinet at a special meeting to be held on 15th July 2020. The report was presented to the panel for pre-decision consultation and comment.

The report was introduced by the Leader of the Council. He explained this was an exciting and ambitious proposal to transform the Western (Flottergate) area of Freshney Place. The scheme would be made possible subject to an application for grant funding to the Government's Future High Street Funding Programme. The council would be bidding for up to £25m towards the cost of the scheme. The rationale behind the bid recognised the need to move from a reliance on retail outlets in Grimsby town centre; to bring more people into the town centre for leisure and recreation, both during the day and in the night-time economy. The scheme before members was an opportunity to start to do just that. It would see the demolition of the old market hall and former British Home Stores site, with development of a multi-screen cinema and new market hall. There would be a food and beverage offer plus a new public square. Much publicity and public consultation preceded this report and the submission, which would be made later in July, 2020. The authority had been working closely with owners of Freshney Place and experts in retail, leisure and urban regeneration sectors. This scheme was viable and suitable for this site. He reminded the panel that this was only one part of proposals to regenerate the town centre. Further bids would be made to the Government's Stronger Town's Programme.

Mr Jaines-White made a brief presentation, which would be made available for public viewing, via the council's website, after this meeting.

The Chair thanked Mr Jaines-White for an excellent presentation. He felt the scheme would be excellent for the town and was much needed in the current and anticipated economic climate. He commended the proposal and invited questions from the panel.

Members raised the following issues:

In response to concerns around the viability of the development relating to future cinema use, food and beverage franchises, site location and an increasing number of vacant units, Mr Jaines-White explained professionals were all too conscious of an extremely challenging economic climate for leisure industries, including cinema development, notwithstanding those brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Conversations with providers had been undertaken on our behalf; it was likely that regional operators would show the most interest. Mr Jaines-White stressed that he would not be recommending any scheme to be taken forward without a clear pre-let on this part of the proposals. Securing this would ensure that the two largest elements of the development were

let; the cinema and the market hall. Regarding food and beverage outlets, the authority was also aware of challenges here and this was the rationale behind a relatively small food and beverage provision as part of the mixed leisure scheme. The reverse had been the case in the failed, private investment led, Riverhead scheme. He reassured the panel that Riverhead Square was being kept at the forefront of developments under the Stronger Towns Funding bid, and would, subject to public views, act as a pivot point allowing movement from North to South, from the Riverhead through Garth Lane and beyond. Regarding retail units, that was a matter for Freshney Place. However, there was scope in this scheme to relocate all of those Flottergate businesses into the market or Freshney Place. It was certainly not the intention to create more retail units. Mr Hope added that a downward turn in retail and food and beverage outlets was well reported. This was due in some part to over expansion by national chains. It had been that particular trend that had negatively affected the Riverhead scheme. Local authority, leisure led, schemes with established regional/local partners were again becoming more prevalent in urban regeneration schemes.

Regarding current low occupancy of newly developed town centre units, the Leader responded that although there would be new structures, the scheme would remove a considerable amount of current retail space. Also, a key part of the proposals was about trying to attract increased footfall into the town centre throughout the day and evening. This would increase the demand for leisure, food, beverage and retail space. The intention was to make the town centre, as a whole, more attractive and bring more people in. This proposal was one part of a wider regeneration plan which would take into consideration the Grimsby Town Deal and further bids to the Stronger Towns Funding programme. Mr Jaines-White added that Government's current focus was largely on town centre/urban regeneration and given Grimsby's town centre issues he encouraged submission of bold and aspirational schemes, to 'ride the crest' of current Government thinking around urban regeneration.

Members welcomed and supported this aspirational investment in the town centre. They wanted to see the area invigorated and doing well and wanted residents to enjoy visiting Grimsby town centre.

Regarding members' input and influence into the design stage of the project, Mr Jaines-White commented that bold and innovative design elements would of course be subject to funding but he welcomed scrutiny members' ideas now and in future, subject to a successful bid.

Members were concerned about the loss of the market hall car park and the impact upon on-street car parking in adjacent residential areas. Also, of worry was a potential loss of income from one of the busiest car parks in the town centre. These proposals should be considered in light of the council's car parking strategy. Mr Jaines-White reassured members this had been considered as part of the scheme. He acknowledged there would be some displacement to council and other car parks. The council would continue consultation with Freshney Place on an operational

arrangement around servicing and accessing buildings during and post-construction. There would be a reduction in off-road car parking spaces but appropriate capacity for current and future needs in the town centre could be assured. Details about the anticipated income streams affected by the proposals would be forwarded to panel members. The Chair reiterated members' fears about reducing town centre off-street parking without taking account of the impact, urging officers to address these issues in future reports to the panel.

Regarding the Local Plan and a conflict with statements around increasing retail jobs, Mr Jaines-White acknowledged the variance emphasising that the Local Plan had been composed in very different times, Things had changed since then, not least due to the impact of COVID-19. However, the authority was still committed to pursue regeneration projects and he had no concerns on policy matters. The proposals reflected the current leisure and retail needs of the borough and would in any case be subject to the usual planning process.

Members raised concerns about the piecemeal nature of town centre funding bids and fears that the separate elements would conflict and not form a cohesive vision or unified design for the town centre. In particular, it was felt that the spaces between different projects should be taken into account and not 'left behind'. Mr Jaines-White acknowledged that the borough had a 'cocktail' of schemes both underway and in the pipeline but there was confidence that continued engagement with Government and others would secure funds. He could give no guarantees, but subject to funding, schemes would be joined-up and there would not be a patchwork of projects.

Regarding climate change and the 'green agenda', members could see a great opportunity and scope to realise innovative and bold designs to create a landmark, sustainable development for Grimsby Town Centre. However, this was not evident in the Cabinet report now submitted. Members considered an additional recommendation aimed at influencing Cabinet to consider the green agenda and make it integral to the bid. The intention would be to commit to innovative ways to reduce environmental impact. Mr Jaines-White supported members' vision but cautioned the panel against, at this stage of the process, being too prescriptive about these important issues. The Leader echoed members' ambitions but felt that the report made it clear that replacing existing structures with buildings with more energy efficiency and thermal performance would have a positive environmental impact. Also important was the potential to encourage more local people to spend their leisure time closer to home rather than travelling to out of town facilities. Mr Jones assured the panel that the council was duty bound in all its decision making to look at all climate change initiatives and consider the impact of its decisions on climate change and the environment. Given this assurance the proposal for an additional recommendation was withdrawn.

Members acknowledged that anti-social behaviour in the town centre was improving but Victoria Street could still be an unpleasant place to be.

There remained a problem of vehicles frequenting the pedestrianised areas and causing nuisance through-out the working day. Mr Jaines-White advised the panel that he was a participant in a Humberside Police led multi-agency group which had secured some recent improvements. The group had also been consulted on the project now submitted. The views and support of partners is evident. Mr Jaines-White also alluded to passive surveillance; a term used in crime prevention referring to 'eyes on the street' as a result of urban/environment design. In this case, increased footfall could drive improved behaviour. Regarding vehicles in Victoria Street pedestrian areas, Mr Jaines-White acknowledged the points and would ensure they were referred to highways colleagues and a written reply would be conveyed to panel members.

Members sought reassurances that, in an everchanging world, any development would endeavour to allow future re-purposing or multi-use. Mr Jaines-White confirmed that his team had considered these issues from the earliest stages of the project. Assurances had been sought and received regarding current market demand and flexibility of space.

SPE.19 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED - That the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that discussion of the following business is likely to disclose exempt information within paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

SPE.20 FUTURE HIGH STREET FUNDING APPLICATION – APPENDIX

The panel received an appendix to the report from the Leader of the Council (SPE.18 refers).

Members raised issues relating to property ownership, rental yield, business incentives and disposals.

The Chair thanked members for their comments and enthusiastic engagement on the scheme and on behalf of the panel he looked forward to receiving a further report when the outcome of the funding bid was known.

It was proposed by Councillor Hasthorpe, seconded by Councillor Harness and unanimously:

RESOLVED –

1. That the report and appendix be noted.
2. That the recommendations to Cabinet contained within the report now submitted be supported.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.00 p.m.