

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

SPECIAL ECONOMY SCRUTINY PANEL

13th October 2020

Present:

Councillor Furneaux (in the Chair)
Councillors Barfield, Harness, Hasthorpe, Sheridan, Wilson and Woodward
(substitute for Cairns).

Officers in attendance:

- Marcus Asquith (Partnership Director - Engie)
- Claire Bradbury (Project Management Office Manager)
- Anne Campbell (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Stella Jackson (Grimsby Heritage Action Zone Project Manager – Engie)
- Damien Jaines-White (Acting Assistant Director Regeneration)
- Eve Richardson-Smith (Legal Team Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer)
- Clive Tritton (Interim Director of Economy and Growth)

Also in attendance:

- Councillor Fenty (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Skills and Housing)
- Councillor Jackson (Leader of the Council and overall responsibility for the Town Deal)
- Councillor Procter (Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Heritage and Culture)
- Councillor S Swinburn (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport)
- Richard de Cani (Consultant, Arup)
- Amy McAbendroth (Landscape Architect, Arup)

SPE.37 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

SPE.38 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Wilson declared a personal interest in SPE.39, there being mention of further education in the report. Councillor Wilson is employed by a company which uses the facilities at CATCH.

SPE.39 GRIMSBY TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN FRAMEWORK

The panel considered a report from the Leader of the Council presenting the new Grimsby Town Centre Masterplan framework in its final form following extensive public and stakeholder consultation. The Chair invited the Leader to introduce this item.

The Leader was pleased to be able to introduce this exciting report to the panel prior to Cabinet consideration and following extensive consultation. The Leader highlighted the key principles informing the framework and referenced the £25m earmarked for the Town Deal included in the Government's Stronger Towns' Fund for Grimsby. He emphasized that individual business cases had been submitted for each element of the programme. This was outlined in the following item on tonight's agenda regarding the town investment plan. This £25m was over and above the funding secured as part of the Future High Street funding bid aimed at Victoria Street West. Mr Jaines-White confirmed that the two items on the panel's agenda were intrinsically linked.

Mr de Cani, invited by the Chair, presented the masterplan to the panel. He reminded the panel that the purpose of the plan was to provide a long-term strategic vision to guide the future development of Grimsby town centre. The presentation outlined the development of the plan including purpose and process, consultation, priority projects, vision and principles, character areas and supporting commitments. Key messages from consultation were highlighted in relation to each of the three character areas. In conclusion Mr Jaines-White advised that the plan committed to an annual review to ensure it remained relevant and in context.

Members welcomed the report and raised the following issues:

In response to members questions, Mr de Cani explained that the word 'permeability' in this context related to the ease by which people could move into, out of and around the town centre; especially by foot and by cycle. There were barriers and challenges to fluidity such as the current difficulties to cross Frederick Ward Way. Access to the town centre by car and public transport should also be maintained. The Chair was keen to see improved cycle links into and around the town centre.

Regarding 'permeability through Freshney Place Shopping Centre', Mr de Cani explained that Freshney Place had been designed with a distinct solid façade wall towards the river. It was planned to work with the owners of Freshney Place to break down those solid walls to improve connectivity; in, out and through Freshney Place onto Frederick Ward Way and the Garth Lane developments.

In response to questions about secure cycle parking/storage, Mr de Cani advised that a number of areas had been identified and also included in the plans for Riverhead Square for safe and secure cycle storage. The next stage would explore this in more detail and be more explicit.

Regarding 'café culture' and appropriate licensing strategies, Mr de Cani agreed with points made regarding licensing, management and operation of public spaces. It was the case that the past six months or so had really changed how people valued and used public space. Grimsby Town Centre needed more good quality open spaces for use throughout the day and evening. Spaces with the right design could create and encourage 'café culture' with the right positive outcomes; reducing anti-social behaviour and mis-use. Mr Jaines-White stressed that the 'café-culture' referred to in the report was an outcome from public consultation, emphasising that people wanted 'café culture' in the town centre. The Leader added that reducing anti-social behaviour was high on the public agenda and featured strongly in the public consultation. The council needed to look very closely at reviewing licensing strategies in the town centre to ensure it was family-friendly and opportunities for anti-social behaviour were reduced.

Regarding a central bus hub or transport interchange, Mr de Cani advised that it had been identified that improved bus passenger facilities and a bus interchange in Riverhead Square were needed. Bus operators would be engaged at the next stage to develop plans. The Leader acknowledged that the current arrangements did not work well. How bus facilities could be improved was a large part of the plan and discussions were planned with Stagecoach in this regard.

There were comments on the impact of coronavirus on future plans, especially relating to cinemas and public open spaces (linked to apartment living). Mr de Cani acknowledged the important point being made. People's experiences during the pandemic were changing how they wanted to live, work and play in their environment. Connection to good outdoor public space was becoming more important. The disconnection of Grimsby's waterfront from the town created an opportunity to better reveal the waterfront and water space in the Council's open space strategy. This would enable people to benefit from living closer to the water and to be better connected to the waterfront. People really valued being closer to nature. Relating to the cinema, Mr Jaines-White reminded members that the Masterplan did not refer to a cinema development. What was being alluded to was the Future High Streets funding bid, which, in unprecedented times, had been submitted. This proposal would depend heavily on what happened over the next passing months and into next year. However, Mr Jaines-White was able to inform the panel that cinema operators, both local and regional, remained positive. He assured the panel that the proposals would not be developed without a firm and prudent pre-let being in place. Mr Tritton added that the key to creating a 'café culture' was in the diversification of the offer. A better mix of social, retail, business, residential and leisure in

the town centre would ensure a diversity of users throughout the day and evening in contrast to a current over reliance on retail and a pub-based night time economy.

Regarding consultation, specifically around cycle lanes and cyclists' ability to influence plans, a member believed that cycle routes and lanes were determined by non-cyclists and with motorists in mind. Examples were described. Mr Jaines-White referred to the supporting projects and how connectivity was crucial to quality urban design, especially on foot and by cycle. He hoped that members would be assured that officers were taking this very seriously, specifically around how to improve cycle connectivity in and around the town centre. The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport added that cycleways and improved routes were taken very seriously. The Moody Lane route referred to by the member was the subject of a funding application which would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting to be held on 4th November, 2020. Mr Jaines-White assured the Chair that the panel would be fully consulted on final design as part of public consultation prior to Cabinet decision making.

Regarding a higher education offer in the town centre, Mr Jaines-White advised that this matter had been under review for a time with the University of Lincoln and others. He did not think it likely, in the short term, that an education presence originally proposed would be forthcoming in the current global situation. Hence the Masterplan focused on a number of different initiatives that would add a similar value. Mr Tritton added that the town centre was disadvantaged in that there was no skills presence. It was still an ambition to bring young people into the town centre to learn. This was still an aspiration for the future and was at the heart of this masterplan.

Regarding barriers and responses to consultation plus engagement with young people, Mr de Cani stressed that due to the pandemic, very different tools were used to engage with stakeholders in a virtual way. To get over 3400 people passing through the 'event' with 450 or so responding was, in his experience, a very good response. He did not have the data to hand but he believed the engagement with young people would have been relatively higher due to the method of consultation.

Regarding 'shopping' being fifth on the list of activities people wanted to see in the town centre, Mr Jaines-White acknowledged the comment adding that people's shopping habits were changing well before the consultation and would likely continue to change more rapidly in response to the pandemic.

Regarding references to ice rinks, Mr Jaines-White commented this was in response to the consultation. There did appear to be an opportunity to consider a much wider leisure offer than previously considered.

Regarding public toilets and car parks and ensuring the authority's car parking strategy was linked to future aspirations, Councillors further commented that there had been implications for West Marsh residents as a result of having town centre office accommodation within the ward. Mr Jaines-White agreed with the comments made. Designs emanating from this initial project would provide detail and be subject to further consultation and planning approval. This would ensure the necessary provisions were in place.

On the future of St James' House, Mr Jaines-White agreed that this was an important area. Whilst the authority had no ownership or influence on the property, it very much wanted to see it come back into use, and especially to see the ground floor put to good use.

In response to a query about focus groups and engagement with residents of Alexandra Road in proposals around Alexandra Docks, Mr Jaines-White could not confirm that Alexandra Road residents had been pro-actively targeted. However, focus groups were many and varied and the consultation process was well publicised with a good response. Feedback would be provided, if possible, on specific locations.

Regarding risks and risks assessment, Mr Jaines-White confirmed that the report was not saying that there was "no risk" in the ambitions of the masterplan, rather that there was no risk to the adoption of the masterplan. Individual projects would be risk assessed as they were developed.

Reference was made to the previous masterplan and Mr Jaines-White confirmed that this would be made available to members. He highlighted that the great difference between the past masterplan and the one submitted to the panel now, was that there were significant amounts of money to help get projects moving. This masterplan had a higher degree of success, this would be subject to annual review and there was a need to make sure it remained relevant.

Regarding Garth Lane and apartments (reported in the local media), Mr Jaines-White advised that, on its own, aspirational waterfront residential accommodation was not likely to regenerate the town centre. However, given the suite of interventions and developments proposed, it was suggested that would be the case. He was also able to confirm that the proposed bridge would be relocated as part of the Garth Lane Public Realm.

The Leader acknowledged the good points made by the panel and indeed some of the cynicism around the aspirations of the proposed masterplan. This was not the first of its kind and, in the past, the ambitions had not always been realised. However, on this occasion, Government funding was being made available to support the masterplan and the council's aspirations. Private investment was also essential to bring projects to fruition. Public credibility was important and individual business plans would support each project. The residential

aspect of the masterplan was crucial to increase footfall for demand of the associated leisure and retail elements. This would greatly add to the town centre if it could be delivered. An ice rink was advocated by the current administration, due to the limited lifespan of the current rink at Grimsby Leisure Centre. Viability studies were indicating that this would be a feasible addition to the masterplan; to relocate this and potentially other facilities to the town centre where there were complementary amenities.

Regarding the vision for Alexandra Dock waterfront, Mr de Cani advised on a number of opportunities being explored for improved access. These included walking and cycling around the waterfront and being closer to the water in a more active way as had been successfully created in other towns and cities; using the water as an amenity and resource. Examples given were open water swimming, paddle-boarding, kayaking and triathlons. The authority was starting to explore, with operators and the private sector, to see whether there was a market for the development of these facilities in Grimsby.

RESOLVED – That the report and panel's comments be noted.

SPE.40 TOWN INVESTMENT PLAN – PROJECT PROPOSALS

The panel considered a report from the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Greater Grimsby Town Deal presenting information on the project proposals for the Grimsby Town Investment Plan. The report was presented for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of decision making by Cabinet at its special meeting to be held on 14th October 2020. Mr Jaines-White and Mr de Cani spoke to put the investment plan into context and explained the funding and processes required in moving the investment plan projects forward. Mr de Cani described ambitions and proposals totalling £25m of proposed projects under the stronger towns fund relating to Riverhead Square (£3m), Garth Lane (£8m), public realm and connectivity (£3.6m), central library (£3.8m), St James' Quarter (£1.5m), Victoria Mills Quarter (£1.5m), activation and community enterprise fund (£1m) and a contingency fund (£2.6m).

Members raised the following issues;

Regarding Grimsby central library and the earmarked £3.8m, Mr Jaines-White advised that the relatively high costs were partly the result of past surveys and studies which indicated the presence of asbestos which would have to be safely removed if undertaking any works to the building. It was also the case that this imposing building in the town centre would demand a high quality and modern refurbishment ensuring its future was fit for purpose.

Regarding Victoria Mills, Mr Jaines-White agreed that expanding the use of the waterfront and increasing footfall would necessarily increase the need for more amenities including car parking. He explained that early

discussions were taking place with landowners with the hope of securing additional estate for this purpose.

The panel discussed the long-term strategy, proposed housing developments and research/evidence that the proposed housing projects would increase footfall in the town centre in preference to a well-designed large open public space. Mr de Cani stressed that the housing project was not in isolation, there were a package of projects that would work well together including improvements to public realm, and access to open space including the waterfront plus the complimentary elements of the Future High Street funding bid programme. This combination of projects would encourage people to actively use the town centre. The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Skills and Housing reminded the panel that current residents of Victoria Mills and other nearby housing did not benefit from extensive car parking, many of the residents did not have cars. He referred the panel to other towns and cities that have waterways and well laid out town centres, where they enjoy town centre living. He believed, if the mix was right, that town centre living would become desirable with the programme of works envisaged; fountains, lighting, water edge developments and improved water quality. The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Skills and Housing took an opportunity to thank the panel for good questions and positive comments on the items submitted, he particularly mentioned the bus station, cycle safety and security. He added that enforcement had been a key strand of the current administration's way forward. This approach had a substantial impact in moving anti-social behaviour out of the town centre. In addition to this, £1m was being invested in 'voice over' closed circuit TV in the town centre. All in all, creating a safe and secure environment was a key focus in all of this work. Driving private sector investment was crucial to the success of all of this; the council could not deliver this programme on its own. Indeed, the private sector would determine if there was a market for this type of development in Grimsby town centre; they would do their research. At the moment, he could confirm that there was a fair amount of interest from investors albeit there was still a lot of work to be done. He believed the council was doing all it could to achieve that. He thanked officers, consultants and members for their contributions and committed to consider the comments made during the decision-making process.

The Chair reminded members that they should expect to see future reports relating to these projects as plans developed, whether that be this panel or the Planning Committee. These meetings would give members a further prospect of comment and challenge. Members stressed that their involvement must be timely in order to have proper and effective influence.

In response to questions from the Chair regarding the future of St James' House, Mr Jaines-White advised he was in dialogue with the agents for the diocese and parochial church council. The authority has offered to work with the diocese in the marketing of the site and to support them in ensuring a development that is to the right standard with the right active frontage to add amenity to the square.

Finally, members sought assurances that the masterplan and associated investment plan were achievable and deliverable. The Leader welcomed the question and believed that residents would also be mindful of past promises and undelivered projects. He stressed that the administration was making sure that only viable schemes were being proposed. In contrast to past masterplans, the authority now had the benefit of Stronger Towns funding from the Government. It remained that individual projects required robust business cases and were reliant on private sector funding. The proposals were aimed at delivering schemes that people support and want; the consultation was evidence of that. He was as confident as he could be that these projects would move forward. Mr Tritton added that the delivery and success of the town centre regeneration sat within the growth of the borough. This was one area of real promise: with the renewables sector, freeport and low carbon initiatives including Velocys. This wider economic growth would drive change in the town centre.

In closing, the Chair thanked everyone for their contributions, and on behalf of the panel, he looked forward to seeing each project proposal as it developed.

RESOLVED – That the report and panel's comments be noted.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.26 p.m.