



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 29 July 2021

ECONOMY SCRUTINY PANEL

9th February 2021

Present:

Councillor Furneaux (in the Chair)
Councillors Barfield, Cairns, Callison, Harness, Hasthorpe, Sheridan and Wilson

Officers in attendance:

- Anne Campbell (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Karen Goodwin (Lead Investment Officer)
- Damien Jaines-White (Assistant Director Regeneration)
- Simon Jones (Assistant Director Law, Governance and Assets [Monitoring Officer])
- Sharon Wroot (Executive Director for Environment, Economy and Resources [Section 151 Officer])

Also in attendance:

- Councillor Jackson (Leader of the Council)
- Councillor Procter (Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Housing and Tourism)
- Charlotte Dunlop (Asset Manager, Capreon acting on behalf of Freshney Place)
- Simon Hope (Partner, Montague Evans)
- Nick Strachan (Director, Leslie Jones Architects)

SPE.74 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence from members of the panel for this meeting.

SPE.75 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest from members in respect of any items on the agenda for this meeting.

SPE.76 FUTURE HIGH STREET FUNDING

The panel received a report from the Leader of the Council outlining a proposed transformational regeneration scheme to revitalise Grimsby Town Centre.

The panel had considered the original funding application at a special meeting held on 7 July 2020. This subsequent report was presented to the scrutiny panel for pre-decision consultation and comment and would be considered by Cabinet at a special meeting to be held on 17 February 2021.

In introducing his report, the Leader explained the various elements and projects involved in the regeneration of Grimsby Town centre and the funding sources relating to the Town Centre Masterplan. He looked forward to hearing the panel's comments and ideas.

Members commented on a lack of detail and information within the report circulated to members prior to this meeting. This omission had not allowed members to adequately prepare to scrutinise nor given proper public notice. The Chair acknowledged these comments and echoed them to some extent. However, he stated it was the case that timelines and deadlines were tight and not within the control of the authority in respect of the project(s). Work on the presentation members would receive tonight had been ongoing and 'up to the wire'. The Chair was minded to get as much information as was available via a written report to members and the public at the earliest possible opportunity. He reminded the panel that this would not be the last opportunity for the panel to consider this project. Mr Jaines-White confirmed that this presentation would be circulated to members after the meeting.

Mr Jaines-White explained that the final bid was due to be submitted by the end of the month. At this point the proposals were still conceptual, as before, and naturally remained subject to full planning approval. Final designs would of course come back to scrutiny as part of Cabinet's decision making process.

The presentation, delivered by Mr Jaines-White and Mr Hope, covered the detailed timeline of the project to date, the extent of the site, the original (July 2020) concept scheme, options considered, option appraisal and revised outline scheme plus next steps, milestones and future opportunities to engage with the panel.

Members raised the following issues:

Regarding engagement and support from incumbent and potential retailers, Mr Jaines-White advised that a number of retailers had been engaged as a matter of course. He thought it unlikely that the council would be in a position to influence future policy of large retailers.

In response to questions about developing a diverse, safe and family friendly night-time economy, Mr Jaines-White conceded this was paramount in everyone's aspirations for the area and a major aspect of the master-plan.

Regarding outside space and uncovering the entrance to Freshney Place on Flottergate, Mr Jaines-White advised that this was still a conceptual plan. Mr Strachan went on to say there was a balance to achieve in indoor and outdoor spaces to enjoy the likely food and beverage offer, especially with the challenge of the British climate. Similar schemes in Sheffield and Glasgow demonstrated creative solutions to achieve this balance. There was provision in the budget for a canopy over two units. This would create an external public square with good aspects to enjoy any sunshine but with shelter from the wind and rain. Restaurants would be able to operate all year round. Existing covered areas would be subject to an extensive survey and if existing structures could be safely retained that this would be considered.

Regarding expenditure on street furniture and non-structural works, Mr Jaines-White confirmed that the majority of funding was allocated to construction of new buildings. The public square element did need to be of the appropriate quality to demonstrate transformational change.

In response to questions about the amount of contributions from delivery partner(s), Mr Jaines-White advised the assumption and calculations were based on a 50/50 split.

A member commented on the retention of Devonshire House, stating it was outdated, unattractive and unsuitable for most purposes. Mr Jaines-White acknowledged that it was 'a building of its time'. Due to the £8m reduction in funding the scheme had to consider the affordability of elements; acquisition and demolition of such a building plus the redevelopment of the site into public space would add a significant premium to the scheme and make delivery of the project very challenging.

Regarding the re-development of Freshney Place as a whole, a member questioned the rationale of developing this (Flottergate) area when the Riverhead area was probably better suited to such change of use given the works already being undertaken. Mr Jaines-White advised that the continued evolution of Freshney Place was a reality in light of reducing high-street retail sales. The scheme before the panel tackled the old BHS building, which had issues and the market-hall which was very dated and required increasing maintenance to keep it operational. Stakeholders from Freshney Place were very much joined in on this project; lending their time, effort and resources to the scheme.

In response to questions on the potential cinema development (along with associated access, security, late opening and carparking), Mr Jaines-White advised this would be a matter for Freshney Place and the authority in their management of the assets. Clear arrangements would be in place

and it was anticipated that the western car park would be utilised for this purpose.

Regarding car parking, members were concerned about the impact on residents' parking in the surrounding streets which were largely comprised of terraced properties. This area had a high proportion of rental properties and hence, a transient population. In this cohort there was little commitment to residents' parking schemes. Those that were more settled would struggle to find the annual fee for residents only parking. Mr Jaines-White and Mr Nearney committed to meet with ward councillors to explore policy, issues and in addition, to keep them up to date on proposals.

In response to questions, Mr Jaines-White advised that the management of Grimsby market would remain with the local authority, given it is a charter market. This would be the case irrespective of whether the asset was solely or jointly owned by the council and or other parties.

Members expressed concern about a potential anchor tenant and whether market research had been undertaken to give confidence that a suitable tenant and use could be found. Mr Hope acknowledged that things were very different post-COVID. However, he was able to confirm, once the pandemic was over, there remained a strong possibility for a pre-let for a cinema and/or other family leisure venue. Whilst the cinema, restaurant and beverage industries were experiencing a difficult time during the pandemic, it was also true that local and regional operators were more resilient and likely to come to the fore.

In response to a question from the Chair, Mr Jaines-White advised that the owner of Devonshire House was known, although the occupancy was not. The concept design was hot off the press and he could not speculate on the owner's future plans. Only today had advanced communications continued with interested parties regarding land interests. This included liaising with the owners of Devonshire House to advise them that we did not have any land interests in their property but with an offer to work with them to explore future potential for the site. A member commented that the building could lend itself to conversion to town centre apartments with appropriate parking provision. Mr Jaines-White confirmed that a major aspect of the masterplan was a move to aspirational town centre living. Whether Devonshire House's construction lent itself to such a conversion was unknown.

Regarding whether all units would be pre-let before construction, Mr Jaines-White advised that the market hall would be pre-let to the authority. The cinema would not be a bespoke development to allow flexibility of offer, due in part to the development taking 18-24 months to complete. Smaller leisure, retail, food and beverage units would be of a standard modular construction to allow flexibility.

In response to questions about delivery dates and key milestones of projects, Mr Jaines-White advised that there was an associated critical path but this was awaiting a start date, subject to aforementioned criteria

and other approvals. He was happy to share this with members albeit confidentially, given the lack of clarity on start dates.

Members were broadly in favour of the development of this area. And commended the collaborative working between the council and owners of Freshney Place and other stakeholders.

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

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.40 p.m.