

LITTLEHAMPTON REGENERATION SUB-COMMITTEE

7 October 2020 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Miss Seex (Chairman), B Blanchard-Cooper (Vice-Chairman), Bicknell, Buckland, Mrs Caffyn, Goodheart, Gunner, Miss Rhodes and Dr Walsh

Councillors Charles, Cooper, Mrs Cooper and Roberts were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

13. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2020 were approved by the Subcommittee as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman as soon as possible following the Council's resumption of normal working.

14. STRATEGIC REVIEW OF ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL'S TOURISM SERVICE

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr Adam Bates, Blue Sail Consulting, who had been appointed to undertake a review of the Council's tourism function. The review had considered all aspects of tourism support offered by the authority and its recommendations would be put forward to Cabinet for consideration and decision; the Subcommittee was being requested for their views which would be forwarded to Cabinet to assist their deliberations of the matter.

Mr Bates gave a presentation which covered his brief for the review and what Arun should be doing to fit in with others in marketing, management, and development to improve the offer in the District and to increase staying visitors over the dominance of day visitors as at the present time. Tourism was an important sector for the local economy and, whilst there was a good variety, i.e. coast, towns and countryside, it was felt that what was on offer was good not great and that there was a modest impact on tourism spend and jobs. To encourage visitors to stay, better quality accommodation would be required and experiences provided that were worth travelling for. The offer therefore needed to be renewed, new markets attracted, year round value for money provided and higher value jobs encouraged.

Members welcomed the report from Mr Bates, which they had found interesting and informative and then participated in a question and answer session, summarised as follows:-

- Dominance of day visitors and how best to encourage people to stay in the district to increase the spend. Mr Bates stated that, fundamentally, Arun had two broad markets i.e. families and couples and that generally speaking people

were looking to take short breaks due to changing work patterns. Rural accommodation was increasingly popular, e.g glamping, and for a significant economic impact Travel Lodges/Premier Inns and mid range accommodation was required.

- Concern was raised relating to the resourcing of the plan within the existing resource envelope and the three year time frame. Members were advised that, although there was quite a lot that could be actioned immediately, focus should be given to providing 5 or 6 things that could make the most difference and biggest impact.
- Working with partners was highlighted and particular mention was made to the Littlehampton Harbour Board. Mr Bates agreed that the most should be made of the beaches and River Arun and the opportunities for water based activities, offering a good variety would help get visitors to come and stay longer.

The Chairman thanked Mr Bates for his comprehensive review, useful presentation and attendance at the meeting and invited him to leave if he so wished.

The Chairman then invited the Group Head of Economy to present her report which set out the background to the review, its remit and the four strategic recommendations for the Council's tourism service contained therein. Support and any further comments were being sought from the Subcommittee, which would then be indicated to Cabinet when it considered and decided on the matter at a future meeting. It was also brought to Members' attention that there would be changes to the service should the recommendations be supported.

In opening up the debate, the Chairman welcomed the report from Blue Sail and expressed her view that that approach was the right one and that a Strategic Tourism Investment Role was required to coordinate and work with businesses and towns and seek investment for the District.

Whilst a concern was expressed that any changes to the service should not be part of the discussion, the Group Head of Economy emphasised that, in supporting the recommendations from Blue Sail, change was inherent to the direction the Council would be taking, including the cessation of Sussex by the Sea website, removal of the Visitor Information Points at Bognor Regis, Littlehampton and Arundel and the bi-annual Visitor Guide and she wanted Members to be aware of that. Other Members recognised that that change was contained in the detail of the review and fully supported it as it was recognised that, to achieve an improved role in the tourism sector, things had to move forward and change.

The Subcommittee

RESOLVED

That officers to make Cabinet aware that the review recommendations contained within the Arun Strategic Review of Tourism are supported by the Subcommittee.

15. PROPOSED NEW COMMERCIAL PITCHES ON LITTLEHAMPTON SEAFRONT

In consideration of this matter, Councillors Cooper and Mrs Cooper spoke to the item.

On 26 May 2020 the Development Control Committee considered an application for temporary commercial pitches on the Littlehampton Promenade near the river and at Banjo Road Coach Park. Members had deferred the application on several grounds and particularly wished to receive the views of the Subcommittee prior to determination.

The Subcommittee now received a full and comprehensive report from the Senior Regeneration Officer which addressed all the issues raised by the Development Control Committee in respect of the proposal. Members were advised that the overall aim was to boost the local economy through the enhancement and improvement of the Littlehampton Seafront offer for its visitors. This would draw in more visitors, encourage them to stay longer and spend more, thus increasing footfall which would in turn benefit all the businesses located in the vicinity and, as a footnote, support the aims of the Strategic Tourism Review which had been considered as a previous item on the agenda.

Members expressed a number of concerns in the course of consideration of this matter which revolved around:-

- Potential to replicate facilities/services to the detriment of existing businesses
- Potential sale of alcohol which would exacerbate an already serious problem
- Potential for unattractive units and furniture at the relevant sites
- For safety reasons, paddle boarding or water activities should not be allowed near the river due to it being so fast flowing and dangerous

The Senior Regeneration Officer was able to assure Members that any commercial activities that took place at the two sites could be regulated via conditions attached to an Operating Schedule as drawn up by the Property & Estates Department, in consultation with Legal, to ensure that control was secured on what was being provided. She was also able to advise that the Town Council was keen to utilise Banjo Road and that the Town and District would work together to ensure there was no conflict with other events.

Member comment as made that the proposal offered the opportunity to encourage new outlets into the town to provide activities and services for the benefit of tourists and residents alike and there would be no need to replicate. Additional support was given that there was a need to provide a stronger offering along the seafront

In concluding the debate, it was formally proposed and seconded that the Subcommittee advise the Development Control Committee that it supported the planning application and that restrictions would be attached to the Operating Licence and would be enforced by the Property & Estates Department to ensure that the

Riverside site only provided facilities relating to recreation and entertainment, with no food or drink, and that the Banjo Road site would be permitted to sell food but no alcohol and to provide recreation and entertainment. On being put to the vote, the Subcommittee agreed.

The Subcommittee

RESOLVED

That the Development Control Committee be advised that the Subcommittee supported the planning application and that restrictions will be attached to the Operating Licence and will be enforced by the Property & Estates Department to ensure that the Riverside site only provides facilities relating to recreation and entertainment, with no food or drink, and that the Banjo Road site will be permitted to sell food but no alcohol and to provide recreation and entertainment.

16. ECONOMY GROUP'S SUPPORT TO BUSINESSES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Group Head of Economy presented this report which provided an update on the work of the team to date to support local businesses throughout the pandemic. She particularly highlighted that the Arun Business Partnership had over 3,000 businesses on its mailing list and all members received weekly electronic bulletins with the most up to date government guidance and information. Partnership working throughout this time had played an important role in keeping businesses abreast of the situation and everyone had found creative ways of working to ensure information was circulated to as wide a spectrum as possible. She paid particular tribute to the hard work and commitment of the Revenues & Benefits Team who had worked so diligently to ensure grant payments were sent out in a timely manner.

The Subcommittee was advised by the Group Head of Economy of a number of initiatives and actions covered in the report, both in terms of action taken and steps for moving forward with recovery planning. She was thanked for her comprehensive coverage of the issues detailed and the Leader of the Council also acknowledged the phenomenally huge extra workload that her team and many members of staff had taken on during this very difficult time.

Following brief comment, the Subcommittee noted the report.

17. LITTLEHAMPTON REGENERATION POSITION STATEMENT

In consideration of this item, Councillor Roberts spoke to the item.

In presenting the Position Statement, the Group Head of Economy provided an in depth update in respect of the Littlehampton Town Centre Public Realm Scheme in light of the difficulties that had been experienced. The update could not be included in

the Position Statement included in the agenda as it had to be published prior to the Members' briefing on 29 September.

The Subcommittee was advised that the Council had issued the Invitation to Tender for the public realm in June 2020, as soon as practical after lockdown had been lifted. The tender deadline was 21 July and the bids were assessed by 5 August. Two bids were submitted but one was eliminated because it was non-compliant and the compliant bid was significantly higher than the budget available so could not be accepted.

The project team reviewed the tendering process and bids to understand why the costs were so much over what was expected; the cost increase appeared to be due to increases in materials and the contractors' increased profit margins and contingencies. Value engineering, through changing the paving (by far the single largest expenditure) to an equivalent alternative, would reduce the costs but not enough to bring the project back into budget.

The project team met to discuss options for delivering the scheme within budget and an alternative solution to drop Phase 1 was agreed with key members on 10 September. Funders were then contacted to advise of the changes and implications of this.

A briefing to update Members was held on 29th September.

The second Invitation to Tender (ITT) was published on 5 October with tenders to be returned by 16 November for bids for the detailed design for Phases 1, 2 & 3 of the project and construction of Phases 2 & 3. This was a two stage open book approach and open procedure tender process (i.e. the full tender documents were published for any interested party to access via Contracts Finder). It was hoped this would generate more bids.

The ITT stated a maximum budget for the construction works and all bids over that value would be disqualified. There might be a risk that no contractors would submit bids under the threshold but procurement believed that to be a low risk.

Members participated in some debate on the matter and concerns were raised with regard to the possibility of losing the funding altogether should the completion date not be met. The Group Head of Economy advised that the funders were seeking reassurance that the project would actually be delivered, rather than by a certain date, and she was confident that evidence could be provided to that effect. It was questioned whether it would be better to delay Phase 3 rather than Phase 1 as Phase 1 was the gateway to the town via the train station but a response was given that that was not possible due to the way the funding was set up as Phases 1 & 2 would be funded by the Coastal Communities Fund and Phase 3 was separate LEP funding.

Following further comments, the Subcommittee noted the update and the remainder of the Position Statement.

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18. THANKS

As this was the last meeting of the Subcommittee the Committee Manager, Carrie O'Connor, would be attending before leaving, the Chairman and Members thanked her for her 34 years' service to the Council and wished her well in her retirement.

(The meeting concluded at 9.04 pm)