

ECONOMY COMMITTEE

19 January 2022 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Cooper (Chair), Gunner (Vice-Chair), Dixon, Edwards, Staniforth, Stanley, Dr Walsh, Yeates, Cooper (Substitute for Roberts) and Goodheart (Substitute for Seex)

Councillors Coster, Oppler and Warr were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

561. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Roberts, Goodheart and Northeast.

562. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

563. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2021 were approved by the Committee. These would be signed at the end of the meeting.

564. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair confirmed that no questions were submitted for this meeting.

565. BOGNOR REGIS ARCADE ROOF REPLACEMENT

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Property, Estates & Facilities Manager introduced the report to the Committee. He explained that the Council had been aware of the poor condition of the large section of flat roof to the east side of the Arcade, which had been patched many times both during and before Council ownership of the building. The condition had deteriorated more rapidly than expected and had now come to the end of its life. During heavy rainfall the water effected some ground floor commercial premises and damaged surfaces. Action was needed now, to prevent more serious failure or compensation events. In January last year Members had been provided with a seminar in which several viability options for the upper floors were presented, including an option for the creation of an additional storey above the defective flat roof area, however it was not deemed to enhance the financial viability of the scheme. Given the viability conclusion, it was in the best interests of the Council to proceed with the replacement of the defective flat roof, which would be of benefit to

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future use of the upper floors and would protect viability of ground floor units. The flat roof had been surveyed by a contractor and this indicated that potential structural defects were likely to exist within the fabric of the roof as a result of ongoing water penetration. The cost was estimated to be around £210, 000. It was acknowledged that retail remained in a delicate state, and any charges levied would be in consultation with leaseholders. The Ward Members had been consulted and no negative comments had been received.

Members (and non-Committee Members given permission to speak) then took part in a question and answer session as summarised below:

- There was concern about the recommendations, as it was felt this could restrict future options. It was suggested that a temporary roof be erected in the short term, while a future plan for the building was drawn up. The Property, Estates & Facilities Manager explained that access on the roof would still be required, and the site was very exposed, so a temporary roof may not last long, and also would not look attractive.
- The building was in a poor state when it was bought, and was likely to deteriorate further, the purchase of the building was a failed investment that the Council should get out of as quickly as possible. It was an important heritage site, and the features should be preserved, particularly the Northern façade, but there was concern about spending the sum of money on a solution that may have to be removed to allow further development.
- It was too early to fully explore expanding the top floor of the arcade, and there was concern that erecting the new roof would take that option away.
- The ground floor was hosting some wonderful businesses and concern was expressed about passing the costs onto those businesses. The Property, Estates & Facilities Manager explained that businesses would be worked with to explore whether or not costs could be recovered over time. He explained that the rent assistance scheme had been introduced to help the businesses.
- All areas of the building should be opened up, so the building was fully available to use and rent out.
- It was acknowledged that there was a health and safety aspect issue with the current roof. It was suggested that there should be a condition the cost was not recovered from tenants.
- Clarification was sought on the Managing Agent of the premises.
- Clarification was sought on the state of the roof, and the type of rot that it had.
- It was suggested the titles could be divided so the listed façade be on a separate title, then the remainder of the building could be developed separately. It was explained that this would result in the loss of the businesses that were current leaseholders.
- Further support was offered for the idea of a temporary roof.
- The building needed to be protected and the roof should be replaced. To delay the works would be going against the recommendations of the Officers. The business tenants wanted this work to be done.
- The Council had a duty of care to the business tenants.

The recommendations were Proposed by Councillor Andy Cooper and Seconded by Councillor Gunner.

It was requested that each recommendation be voted upon separately, which then took place.

The Committee

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Council proceed with the procurement of essential urgent flat roof replacement and associated works to the Bognor Regis Arcade building.
- 2) Authority be delegated to the Group Head of Technical Services, to authorise and enter into contract with, and place order for, the tendered roofing works with the economically most advantageous contractor following the procurement exercise, subject to approval of 2022/23 budget at Full Council in February 2022.
- 3) A report be brought back to Committee as soon as possible with a recommendation on future use of the upper floors of the Arcade.

566. FITZLEET MULTI STOREY CAR PARK, BOGNOR REGIS - RESURFACING PLANNED MAINTENANCE WORKS

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Property, Estates & Facilities Manager introduced the report to the Committee. He explained the works proposed under the report formed part of the maintenance plan for the asset and highlighted that the 15 year care plan was appended to the report. There had been accelerated wear to the surfaces of Level 1 and 2, which had resulted in increased risk of water penetration to the supermarket below. The wear also resulted in decreased surface traction which posed risks to users of the building. Having identified the risk, taking no action could be deemed a criminal offence in the Health and Safety at Work Act. The works were estimated to cost in the region of £350,000, which was included in the Capital Asset Management Budget for 2021/22. The car park would need to be temporarily closed for the work to be carried out, however this would be done in the quieter period to reduce inconvenience to users. While the Car Park was closed, the opportunity would be taken to carry out other maintenance tasks, to minimise inconvenience to customers. It was estimated the closure would result in a loss of £3700 to the Council in terms of car parking revenue. Consultation had been carried out with Bognor Regis BID, Bognor Town Council and local Ward Members, who were in support and no adverse comments had been received.

Members then took part in a question and answer session as summarised below:

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- The car park was not making a huge return, however it was understood that it needed to be maintained to ensure safety, and there was no choice but to carry out the repairs. There was however, concern amount the amount of money being spent, and future plans for the car park should be looked at. The Property, Estates & Facilities Manager confirmed the future of the building could be looked at separately.
- The 15-year plan listed how much money would be spent on car parks, which was an astonishing amount of money. Although it was acknowledged the Council had a responsibility to maintain the car park, it could not be seen as sustainable, and alternatives needed to be looked at.
- Clarification was sought around costs and the 15-year care plan.
- The car park was an expensive asset for the Council, which was losing money, and did not have many people parking in. It was unfair on the Council Tax payers to pay for the resurfacing of the car park each year.

Following further discussion about the future of the car park, the recommendations were Proposed by Councillor Walsh, with the addition of a third recommendation which was 'Officers to bring a report on possible alternative ownership and maintenance at an early opportunity'. These were Seconded by Councillor Andy Cooper.

The Committee

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Council proceed with the procurement of essential waterproof coverings and associated works to the Fitzleet Multi Storey Car Park.
- 2) Authority be delegated to the Group Head for Technical Services, to authorise and enter into contract with, and place order for, the tendered works with the most economically advantageous contractor following the procurement exercise.
- 3) Officers to bring a report on possible alternative ownership and maintenance at an early opportunity.

567. BEDFORD STREET PUBLIC TOILET REFURBISHMENT

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Property, Estates & Facilities Manager introduced the report to the Committee. He explained the project was included with the Council's 5 Year Planned Maintenance Programme and was in accordance with the Council's Strategic Vision of the future of public conveniences within Arun, that had been approved by the Council in 2018. These were one of the Council's most used conveniences. They were subject to regular anti-social behaviours, so it was considered important that the redesign looked at addressing those issues. The cubicles would be unisex and would open out into a wide central communal area that would be visible

from Bedford Street. Baby-changing facilities would be included. The works were expected to cost in the region of £250,000. Consultation has been carried out with Bognor Regis Town Council, Bognor Regis BID, Ward Members, Sussex Police and the Council's own Community and Wellbeing Team. A reply had been received from Bognor Regis Town Council that day, which the Property, Estates & Facilities Manager read out, which was in summary, neither for nor against the proposed refurbishment.

Members then took part in a question and answer session as summarised below:

- How many cubicles were likely to have baby change facilities? The Property, Estates & Facilities Manager would send a written answer to Members.
- Would the service corridors be accessible to the public and would basins be inside the cubicles? It was confirmed the service cupboards would not be accessible to the public and would be locked. The basins and dryers would be inside the cubicles.
- Concern was raised about the toilets being unisex and it was thought guidance had changed from government which it was thought now stated there should be proper provision of gender specific toilets.
- The refurbishment would be a vast improvement, and the Police and the antisocial behaviour team had been consulted.
- Was the central communal area covered and would there be a gate that could be locked at night? It was confirmed that the central communal area was not roofed and there would be a gate on the outside, which would be locked at night.
- It was asked whether there would be drainage in the toilets, to resolve any problems around spillage.
- A Changing Places Toilet would have been beneficial, and there was disappointment this could not be included. The Property, Estates & Facilities Manager explained Changing Places Toilets were an additional expense, and there was already provision for this nearby. Bedford Street was not near a car park so was not an ideal location for Changing Places Toilets.
- Further concern was expressed around unisex toilets, however it was acknowledged these were now very common.
- How would the design prevent the anti-social behaviour? It was explained that a lot of the anti-social behaviour related to drug dealing in the closed communal areas as they were out of sight. This was less likely in an open communal space with closed cubicles.

The recommendations were Proposed by Councillor Gunner and Seconded by Councillor Edwards.

The Committee

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Council proceed with the procurement of the revised design and refurbishment and associated works to Bedford Street Public Toilets as presented.

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- 2) Authority be delegated to the Group Head of Technical Services, to authorise and enter into contract with, and place order for, the tendered works with the most economically advantageous contractor following the procurement exercise to enable project delivery.
- 3) The funding for the project of £250,000 be moved from 2021/22 to 2022/23 to align with the likely delivery of the works.

568. COVID ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS BUSINESS GRANT FUNDING

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Business Development Manager introduced the report to the Committee. She explained that over the past 20 months the Council had been provided with various amounts of funding from Central Government to allocate grants to businesses that had been affected by Covid. To date almost 2000 discretionary grants had been awarded. This report only covered discretionary grants. In December an additional top-up to support businesses affected by ongoing restrictions was announced and the Council received £237,000, which was considerably lower than previous awards. The scheme agreed in mid 2021 has been updated and this was what Members were being asked to agree. Once agreed discretionary grants could be given to businesses.

Members expressed support for the grants and the recommendations. The grants were there to help businesses in the District and those that were eligible were encouraged to apply.

The Chair thanked the Business Development Manager for the work she had done on delivering grants throughout the pandemic.

The recommendations were Proposed by Councillor Andy Cooper and Seconded by Councillor Gunner.

The Committee

RESOLVED that

- 1) The delivery of the latest Additional Restrictions Discretionary Grant scheme for businesses as set out in the West Sussex Councils' guidelines, attached as Appendix A, be agreed; and
- 2) Authority be granted to the Director of Place to agree any future Covid related business support grant schemes.

569. GRANT TO ARUN ARTS, ALEXANDRA THEATRE, BOGNOR REGIS

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Group Head of Economy introduced the report to the Committee. She highlighted the progress the Theatre had made in terms of sales and performances that they provided. They had continuously improved their offer over a number of years. The building was old and the maintenance was a struggle, however the grant which has come from the Levelling Up Fund should help to resolve those problems in the future. The financial sustainability of the Theatre was an ongoing challenge but moving into a positive situation, although the pandemic had had an impact. Arun Arts were crucial partners in the project.

Members (and non-Committee Members given permission to speak) then took part in a question and answer session as summarised below:

- The Alexandra Theatre was a wonderful theatre, and the work that had been done over the last few years has really turned it around. Prior to Covid they were drawing in all kinds of performers and nationally recognised comics. The viability of the theatre was vital and it was very important the Theatre was supported.
- The team at the Theatre did a great job, and it was a constant battle for them to survive. The grant was supported and could have gone further.
- A replacement roof for the Theatre was important. It was noted that the Theatre would need to be closed for a significant period while the works, which were part of the Levelling Up Fund, were carried out. Whilst the grant was welcomed, clarity was sought on the timings of this. The Group Head of Economy confirmed that the Theatre would be worked with, and expectations were to keep the Theatre open for as much as possible.

During the question and answer session Councillor Stanley proposed an amendment to the recommendations which was to cover an additional £28,000 of urgent repairs. There was no Secunder for this amendment, and it was therefore not considered.

The recommendations were Proposed by Councillor Andy Cooper and Seconded by Councillor Gunner.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That the provision of a grant of £15,000 per annum for two years to Arun Arts in 22/23 & 23/24 financial years be approved.

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570. COMMITTEE REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS 2022/2023

[During this item Cllr Walsh declared a Personal Interest as a Member of Littlehampton Town Council]

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Interim Group Head of Corporate Support and Section 151 Officer introduced this report, reminding Councillors that this was the first year that the Council's Budget had been produced under the new Committee style of governance. The Committee was provided with a brief reminder of the process in formulating the Budget for 2022/23. The detailed budget papers for this Committee to consider were set out in Appendix A of the report and only contained essential/committed growth items. Members were asked to note that there had been significant pressure on establishment budgets, which assumed a 1.75% pay award this year and a 2.5% pay award for 2022/23, and a 1.25% increase for employer's National Insurance contributions. The uncommitted growth items for this Committee were included in Appendix B and totalled £545,000. The Capital Programme in Appendix C showed the essential maintenance required for corporate assets, totalling £807,000. The proposed budget for 2022/23 was being presented for the Committee to agree before being considered, as part of the total budget, by the Policy & Finance Committee. Members were reminded of the Budget Briefing to be held on 16 February 2022

Members thanked the Interim Group Head of Corporate Support and Section 151 Officer for the Budget. Support was offered and various points were highlighted by Members, such as Economic Regeneration going from £119,000 to a proposed £271,000 in 2022/23; the Sussex by the Sea Festival; town centre events; additional support for high street recovery; another £150,000 for events.

The Vision document was discussed, and it was noted that perception was that money was not spent on the town centres, and it was hoped that the Vision document would change this perception. It was stated that it was regrettable that the call-for-ideas came before the Vision, as usually it would be the other way round.

Clarification was sought around inflation and how this was being handled, and also the contingency for gas and electric. An answer was provided by the Group Head of Corporate Support and Section 151 Officer and the Interim Chief Executive.

The Sussex by the Sea Festival was discussed, and it was asked where this would take place. The Group Head of Economy said the idea was that it would be held in Littlehampton, and they had been looking for partners to work with. Since the last report had gone to Committee regarding this, the Council had received the Levelling Up Fund money, which would mean significant activity and changes to the infrastructure on the seafront, it therefore needed to be carefully considered so events wouldn't impact on parking while the changes were taking place.

Councillor Walsh declared a Personal Interest as a Member of Littlehampton Town Council. He asked that any event programmes were done in partnership with the Town Councils, so there was not duplication or overlap. The Group Head of Economy

confirmed that events would be planned whilst working with partners including Parish and Town Councils.

Several Members expressed that they felt it was an exciting and positive Budget report.

The recommendations were Proposed by Councillor Gunner and Seconded by Councillor Edwards.

The Committee

RESOLVED that

- 1) The 2022/23 Revenue Budget as illustrated in Appendix A of this report be agreed;
- 2) The 2022/23 list of uncommitted growth items as illustrated in Appendix B of this report be agreed;
- 3) The 2022/23 Capital Programme as illustrated in Appendix C of this report be agreed

The Committee also

RECOMMEND TO THE POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

- 1) That the Revenue Budget, list of growth items and Capital Programme for this Committee be included in the overall General Fund Budget when considering the overall budgets on 10 February 2022

571. OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no Outside Bodies updates from Members.

572. WORK PROGRAMME

Members sought clarification on items listed on the Work Programme, which was provided by Officers.

It was asked whether a strategy could be developed to improve average wage levels across the District. The Group Head of Economy explained that the Council had adopted its Economic Development Strategy, which clearly set out the key sectors locally, where the strengths and weaknesses were, and what the Council should be prioritising in terms of resources. The action plan supporting the Economic Development Strategy had been signed off last July, which clearly set out the ways the Council could influence the local economy. The Council were unable to dictate that

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people must be paid more, but could work to attract businesses that pay better salaries, and upskill the workforce so they could be provided with more opportunities. That document was working towards improved prosperity in the community.

The Chair explained that most actions of the Economy Committee were ultimately to address the economic prosperity in the community in some way. The Chair confirmed that he would liaise with the Group Head of Economy to look at putting this on the agenda of a future meeting.

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

(The meeting concluded at 8.29 pm)