

ECONOMY COMMITTEE

22 November 2022 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Cooper (Chair), Gunner (Vice-Chair), Bennett (Substitute for Stanley), Mrs Cooper (Substitute for Roberts), Dixon, Edwards, Northeast, Pendleton, Seex, Dr Walsh and Yeates

Councillor Coster was also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

436. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Roberts and Stanley.

437. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

438. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2022 were approved and signed by the Chair.

439. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA THAT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

There were no urgent items.

440. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions submitted before the deadline.

441. BEACH HUT PROGRESS REPORT

The Interim Property, Estates & Facilities Manager provided members with an overview of his update report that explained the progress made by officers to date. He confirmed that it also detailed the budget had been brought forward from the previous financial year. He confirmed that the design of the 3 accessible huts that had been requested by members had now been agreed with the manufacturer. Following this a draft layout of all 13 huts had been drawn up and the next stage of the process was for Officers to prepare and submit a planning application. He also confirmed that new locations for Beach Huts across the District was under review however, advice from legal was still outstanding to confirm if the new locations would be viable or not. He also provided a further update regarding the Littlehampton scheme whereby it was confirmed that updated cost estimates had been received and these could still be delivered within the original budget agreed. In summing up he provided members with

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his draft timeline, where he expected that the planning application would be submitted to the Planning Department by end of December 2022, there was a 8-month lead in time to be accounted for with the manufacturer, along with a 3-month manufacture time. It was therefore anticipated that the installation of the Beach Huts would be expected by Summer 2024.

The Chair thanked the Interim Property, Estates and Facilities Manager for his comprehensive update and then invited questions from members. A summary of questions and points raised is below;

A query was raised regarding possible severe constraints with one of the new locations under review, given that the huts would be located on shingle, detailed at 3.5.3 in the report. Discussion was had regarding the stability of the shingle in the area, and it was confirmed that due diligence work was still required to be undertaken.

In reference to the Littlehampton Beach Huts, it was raised that whilst it was a good start, more accessible huts should be built into future plans, given that only 3 of the Beach Huts would be accessible huts out of the 13 Beach Huts being planned for.

Further clarification was sought in relation to the additional cost of the accessible Beach Huts and did these costs still come within the original budget agreed. It was confirmed that the original budget did meet the additional costs for the 3 accessible Beach Huts.

An in-depth discussion took place regarding the draft timeline and the estimated installation date of Summer 2024, where it was reconfirmed that Planning permission was still required, along with a procurement exercise on top of 8-month lead in time from the point of order with the manufacturer. Members were also reminded by the Chair that it had to be acknowledged and accepted that Officers had been asked to make changes to the original plans that were put in front of members and that these changes were not quick to scope and implement. A suggestion regarding ordering Beach Huts in a larger sum e.g., 50 huts, could this then speed up the process for future plans as well as potentially bring down the overall cost. Additionally specific questions were asked regarding the detail of the exact location of Beach Huts referred to in the report at section 3.4, 3.5.1, 3.5.2 as well as what style of Beach Hut had been chosen for these areas. It was confirmed that it was intended to match the recent composite huts that were already in place.

The Director of Growth highlighted to members that the variation of the comments made during the discussion, confirmed why the process was taking the time that it was. He confirmed that Officers were listening to all the points raised and further detail would be brought back to members at a later date.

The Vice-Chair and Leader of the Council reminded members that the original planning application that was submitted was refused by the Planning Committee and that this had also had a significant impact on the timeframe for this process.

The Chair again thanked the Interim Property, Estates and Facilities Manager and his team, of which he acknowledged was understaffed currently for the work undertaken so far and his update at the meeting. He stated to members that this was a good news story and that changes made to include accessible Beach Huts was a move in the right direction for the district.

The Committee then noted the update.

442. PIER ROAD CONSULTATION - SURVEY RESULTS AND NEXT STEPS

(Councillor Walsh declared a Personal interest in this item as a West Sussex County Councillor.)

The Group Head of Business and Economy advised members that the report before them was to advise them of the results from the survey that had been conducted over August and September 2022. She confirmed that the consultation was undertaken due to the closure of Pier Road had been done using emergency measures (now no longer available to be used) implemented during the pandemic to help with social distancing. Officers felt it was a good opportunity to undertake a survey to gauge feedback from the community of their feelings on the previous road closures and future options to be considered. She confirmed that 864 people had completed the survey which was a really good response rate. She advised members that the recommendations are asking them to consider their support for a permanent closure as this had been the preferred outcome from the survey. She explained that the next steps should members support the recommendation would be that Officers would make contact with West Sussex County Council who are the responsible authority, she explained that it would be a complex process which was likely to take time.

The Chair thanked the Group Head of Business and Economy for her detailed report and invited the Vice-Chair to speak. The Vice-Chair also expressed his thanks to the Group Head of Business and Economy and her team for the work they had undertaken. He stated the permanent closure had been the most popular choice and that should the route be taken then there was an opportunity for a complete redesign of the road, from lighting through to seating. It was an opportunity to bring a transformative change for the community. He confirmed he was “enthusiastically” in favour of the permanent closure.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrats was then invited to make comment, where he stated that he was in favour for a seasonal closure, he explained his reasons for this in detail covering his review of the road closure during the pandemic and some of the issues he felt would require improvement (signage and lighting) should a seasonal closure be pursued. He also stated that transformation of the space could still be achieved with a seasonal closure from changing the road colour, seating and lighting as well as accommodating car users.

Other comments and questions asked have been summarised below;

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It was asked why West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) did not support a permanent closure and what were the expected costings for this project. It was explained that WSSCC did not support permanent closures as it was not something that they normally consider. It was also confirmed that should a permanent closure be pursued the majority of the costs for this would be covered by WSSCC, however once the council reaches the stage of financial costings these would be brought back to Committee for their review.

It was commented that it was important to consider storage solutions for any furniture should a seasonal closure be chosen. Additionally parking solutions for disabled car users and those working for delivery and emergency services should also be given consideration.

The Director of Growth confirmed that a temporary closure which would be the option for a seasonal closure has a limit of 3 days. The Chair advised members that the businesses in Pier Road changed their business model in order to adapt to the constraints the pandemic imposed, and they could and would be able to adapt to a full road closure. It was also highlighted by members that from the survey results 77% of businesses opted to 'do nothing'.

The Group Head of Business and Economy then reminded members of the recommendations that were before them in the report. She explained that direction for the next step was needed in order for officers to move forward with discussions. She reminded members that there would be significant legislation to work through and this was merely the beginning of a very long process.

The recommendations were then proposed by Councillor Gunner and seconded by Councillor Pendleton at which point Councillor Walsh proposed an amendment which was seconded by Councillor Dixon (deletions highlighted with strikethrough and additions in **bold**);

- 2.1.1. Supports the principle of ~~permanently~~**permanent or seasonal** closing Pier Road to through-traffic.
- 2.1.2. Authorises officers to engage with West Sussex County Council as Highway Authority in order to appraise the feasibility, process, legal requirements, costs (both capital and revenue), timescales, and necessary agreements to deliver the preferred option of a ~~permanent~~**permanent or seasonal** closure.

Upon debate on the amendment proposed it was clear that there were differing opinions across the committee and on putting the amendment to the vote it was declared LOST on the Chair's casting vote.

Returning to the substantive recommendations;

The Committee

RESOLVED that it

- 2.1.1. Supports the principle of permanently closing Pier Road to through-traffic.
- 2.1.2. Authorises officers to engage with West Sussex County Council as Highway Authority in order to appraise the feasibility, process, legal requirements, costs (both capital and revenue), timescales, and necessary agreements to deliver the preferred option of a permanent closure.
- 2.1.3. Authorises officers to explore the opportunity of increasing the length of the proposed closure area to include the area of highway as far north as the Gravy Boat restaurant;
- 2.1.4. Requests that officers provide a report to a future meeting of the Committee setting out officers' findings and conclusions in respect of recommendation 2.1.2 and 2.1.3.

443. QUARTER 2 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS REPORT

The Director of Growth advised members that the report before them detailed the Quarter 2 performance indicators and that the report was to be taken as read.

The Chair then invited members to ask any questions on the performance detailed. It was commented that neighbouring authorities were not seeing the same level of business occupation that the council had and it was refreshing to see and very positive for the District. There was also discussion concerning the arcade in Littlehampton where it was confirmed that conversations were on going with 3 businesses along with new tenants moving in. It was stated that there were no intentions of the arcade being knocked down, and detailed discussions with WSCC who are responsible for the highway through the arcade were also taking place.

The Chair thanked and congratulated the officer team with the work they continue to undertake stating that their work was vitally important and was keeping our district alive and a float.

The Committee then noted the report.

444. OUTSIDE BODIES UPDATE

There were no updates for this meeting.

445. WORK PROGRAMME

Members noted the work programme for the remaining meeting of the Committee for this municipal year.

Subject to approval at the next Economy Committee meeting

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(The meeting concluded at 7.40 pm)