

ECONOMY COMMITTEE

20 November 2023 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Nash (Chair), Dr Walsh (Vice-Chair), Cooper, Gunner, Lawrence, Lloyd, Needs, Northeast, Pendleton (Substitute for Edwards), Penycate and Yeates (Substitute for Stanley)

Councillors Blanchard-Cooper and McAuliffe were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

389. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Edwards and Stanley.

390. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Walsh declared a Personal Interest in agenda item 6 [Arun Visitor Strategy] as a member of West Sussex County Council.

Councillor Pendleton declared a Personal Interest in agenda item 6 [Arun Visitor Strategy] as a member of West Sussex County Council.

Councillors Nash, Needs and Yeates redeclared their personal interests as a members of Bognor Regis Town Council as confirmed in their Register of Interest forms.

391. MINUTES

The minutes of the Economy Committee meeting held on 5 October 2023, were approved by the committee and signed by the Chair.

392. 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 presented at the meeting.

393. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair confirmed that there were no public questions submitted for the meeting.

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394. ARUN VISITOR STRATEGY

The Tourism Development Officer introduced to members her report and the Visitor Strategy created by Blue Sail Consultants. She explained that the strategy sets out 8 priorities and suggested actions to guide the strategy delivery for the next 5 years', subject to available resources. She confirmed that a members' briefing about the strategy was recently held and a recording of that briefing was still available for members to view should they not have been able to attend.

The Chair then invited questions from members and during the debate the following was raised, it was stated that it was felt there was missing element in terms of what the strategy was marketing. The marketing of the Arun District was believed to not be the right focus. There should be specific focus through Sussex by the Sea on Bognor Regis and Littlehampton as both had unique identities, from Butlins and the seafront with a soon to be refurbished Alexandra Theatre in Bognor Regis to the offering of excellent growing number of restaurants and cafes in Littlehampton. It was suggested that highlighting these offerings would ensure that not only visitors but that residents living in the district would be drawn in to make use of what facilities were available. Additionally, it was commented that there was an under catered sector in terms of glamping, mobile home and caravan tourers that could be tapped into with the attraction of the open spaces between the coastal plain and the downs the district had to offer. It was noted that the marketing of the district as 'Sussex by the Sea' was the subject of the next agenda item.

One member stated that it was disappointing to note that only 2 out of 54 members had taken up the opportunity to be a part of the visitor strategy consultation work that had been completed. It was questioned how the priorities would be shown to be achieved and if a focus on business visitors was the right direction. The actions confirmed that there was a 'clear pull' to Arundel, but it was stated that more work was needed on this aspect, along with understanding the level of interest regarding glamping and alternative accommodation within the district. A focus on advertising Arun as a place to invest was requested. It was queried if a further report would be presented to committee to update on the actions implemented and covering how they were delivering for the district.

Other comments made were that both Bognor Regis and Littlehampton were focused on ensuring that the Towns were as accessible as possible for all abilities. Focus and encouragement should be given to advertising Littlehampton as a 'day trip' destination and working with Coach companies to ensure this was offered should be picked up. It was stated that the marketing behind Sussex by the Sea had been gaining good social media presence and this was a great tool for local businesses to use and feed into. The report stated that Brexit and Covid-19 Pandemic had created challenges, however the challenges also created opportunities that could be pursued to the district's betterment. There was a differing of opinion across the committee in relation to earlier comments made about the opportunities that could be gained from caravan visitors as it was also felt that these visitors would not stay long in the area when travelling through the district and the strategy should focus on achieving visitors who would stay and

make use of the accommodation already available. If the current accommodation was not good enough, then a focus to expand and improve this should also be considered.

The Group Head of Economy was invited by the Chair to respond to the points raised during the debate where she provided a response to the key points raised and confirmed that an additional update report could be brought back to committee as requested.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Cooper and seconded by Councillor Walsh.

The Committee

RESOLVED

2.1 that it endorsed the new Visitor Strategy for 2023 – 2028 and;

2.2 that it supported officers' delivery of priorities and actions as set out in the strategy.

395. DESTINATION AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

The Tourism Development Officer provided members with a brief overview of the report where she explained that the campaign was about the Arun district being branded as 'Sussex by the Sea', one of the main talking points is that it not just encourages visitors but residents of the district to visit each of the towns within the district. The marketing campaign is encouraging people to find out more about the Arun district, working with the marketing agency she said there had been a learning curve initially however, the relationship between the agency and the council was very good and progressing well.

The Chair then invited members to ask any questions where the following points were made, advice was given to stop using Twitter and LinkedIn and Instagram and if there was any spare expenditure this should be directed to using TikTok along with consideration being given to the use of social media influencers which would help raise awareness of the district. The reporting data was queried specifically the geographical nature of where the advertising had 'hit', it was suggested that further consideration be given to specific locations to reach the targeted audience. Additionally, it was asked how the number of visitors that had visited the district directly because of seeing a 'post' or 'video' from the campaign would be reported in the future.

The Chair confirmed that 'Sussex by the Sea' would address all the points raised, the recommendation was proposed by Councillor Walsh and was seconded by Councillor Gunner.

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The Committee

RESOLVED

2.1 that officers commission a second-year Digital Destination Awareness Campaign with the existing agency. This would ensure continuity of delivery and benefit from the knowledge, experience and working relationship built in year one. Officers would continue to monitor the effectiveness of the second-year campaign, to inform direction of future digital activity.

396. DESIGN BRIEF FOR THE CONVERSION OF THE FORMER BREWERS FAYRE PUB

The Regeneration Lead introduced the report to members where he explained that the purpose of the report was to provide members with a follow up from the Extraordinary Economy Committee meeting held on 19 June 2023 which contained the proposed brief for the design feasibility work that was agreed to be completed at the extraordinary meeting.

The Chair stated he was pleased to see the report and design brief, he confirmed that conversations had taken place regarding the halls capacity for large events, 400 seated with a potential for 600/700 standing, and how this alongside the refurbishment of the Theatre would make it an attractive venue. He then invited comments and questions from members where the following points and statements were made, comments of support for a multipurpose venue were made, it was acknowledged that that the amount of work required would be substantial, however it would create a good connection between the seafront and the town and would be an investment for Bognor Regis.

Concern was raised regarding the cost to deliver the project in its entirety, it was questioned where the potential £2/3 million come from to ensure delivery. The Chair stated not all of the detail had been confirmed at this point, this was the early stages of the process. He also advised that there were companies who would be interested in taking on the Royal Hall however, he confirmed that the market had not yet been tested for this interest as yet.

Further concern was expressed that the idea of returning the site back to a 'Royal Hall' was felt to be a 'romantic' notion. When realistically the site required completely modernising. It was suggested that the term 'Royal Hall' should be ditched with a focus on building a space that allowed for long term future use for events such as gigs and sporting events.

Debate then returned to the earlier concern raised regarding how the costs would be found to support delivery of modernising the site. It was commented that the council was currently undergoing a cost saving exercise and how did the project now fit with that focus. It was also queried if consideration had been given to researching a

partnership with Butlins alongside linking with coach companies for securing day trippers to the area. It was stated by one member that whilst they agreed with some of the comments made regarding the potential future uses of the site, the initial cost for the feasibility study alone was £40,000 and once this had been completed the costs would then significantly increase for delivery and the council could not afford this, consideration should be given to knocking it down and rebuilding as this could present a more affordable option. Comments regarding the site being in conflict with the Theatre were also raised as there was an overlap in event offerings between the two. It was also stated that should a private company be brought in to run the site, this would then see a focus for that business to gain profit and was that the best outcome for the council.

The Vice-Chair was invited to speak where he addressed some of the points raised in relation to finances of the project. He also confirmed that that the residents of Bognor Regis had been very vocal about not wanting any more residential units on the seafront. The vision was to provide a tourist attraction for visitors, large conventions, exhibitions and gigs and at this time members were not being asked to make any final decisions or commitments, this was reviewing the options available for consideration.

The Regeneration Lead was then asked to respond to the question raised regarding the statement made by the Chair in relation to how many companies the Council were aware of with an interest in running the site. He confirmed that there had been no formal interest at the current time.

A request was made by Councillor Gunner for a recorded vote to be completed.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Walsh and seconded by Councillor Needs.

The Committee

RESOLVED that

- a) it consented to the production of a design feasibility study for the conversion of the former Brewers Fayre Pub into a multi-use hall.
- b) It approved the project brief (appendix A) as the basis for the design feasibility work.

Those voting for the recommendations were Councillors Lawrence, Nash, Needs, Northeast, Penycate, Walsh and Yeates (7). Those voting against the recommendations were Councillors Cooper, Gunner, Lloyd and Pendleton (4). There were no abstentions.

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397. REGIS CAR PARK DEVELOPMENT

The Regeneration Lead introduced his report where he explained that the proposed brief for the design feasibility work that would explore options for the redevelopment of the entire Regis Centre Car Park into a focal point on the esplanade and frontage. The esplanade is almost entirely flats and desperately needs a leisure focal point for people to use combined with a series of interesting things to do and potentially inclusive or meeting space. The report detailed a number of options for consideration which were detailed in paragraph 3.6 of the report and the plan would be to present designs back to members for all the options detailed for members to then make a decision on which option they would like to pursue.

The Chair thanked the Regeneration Lead for his introduction and then announced that there was an amendment to the recommendations to be presented to the committee. After a short discussion it was agreed that the amendment would be presented after members had had the opportunity to discuss the content of the report first. The Chair then invited members to make their comments on the report, where the following points were raised, it was stated that the detail presented from Coast to Capital were exciting and having leisure facilities and places for people to spend money when the sun wasn't shining would be great for the area. Concern was raised by numerous members that there should not be any limit placed on the options to be considered as it was felt that this would mean that some options would not be considered fully which could lead to regret later on. The need for each option to be fully costed and the earning potential for each option was felt to be of significant importance. Clarity was sought regarding the option for the car park and was the plan for an 'undercroft' or an underground car park to be built. It was confirmed that it was planned for an undercroft with decking on the top. Further clarity was sought with reference to the 'Brewers Fayre' building and the former 'Royal Hall' and were these the same building, the Chair confirmed it was the same building being referenced.

After advice from the Monitoring Officer the recommendation in the report were proposed by Councillor Walsh and seconded by Councillor Needs, the amendment that was referred to earlier in the meeting was then proposed by Councillor Nash and seconded by Councillor Needs, the changes can be seen highlighted in **bold**.

- a. The Economy Committee **agrees** to the production of a design feasibility of the Regis Car Park subject to the following:
 1. **There should be no residential development on this site**
 2. **Instead, there should be exploration of cross subsidy for the car park area by using other sites in Bognor Regis owned by Arun to build residential units**
 3. **The option of `decking` the Regis Car Park to be explored given increased usage in the next few years from the refurbished theatre and proposed new hotel**
 4. **The former Brewers Fayre building be preserved with a view to reviving a multi-purpose entertainment / leisure space (the old Royal Hall) in the near future.**

- b. The Economy Committee approves the project brief, **subject to the changes outlined above.**

Members then continued their debate on the amendment presented where comments received were mixed, members of the opposition felt strongly that the amendment was too restrictive, clarity was sought for the proposed amended recommendation 2 what the cross subsidy for the 'other sites' in Bognor Regis was for and what other sites were being considered and what was the financial proposal for them and would we no require a feasibility for each of these sites. The Regeneration Lead, then read out a statement on behalf of the Interim Chief Executive and Director of Growth for members to consider. Where it was advised that members of the committee consider very carefully any amendment to exclude any residential uses at this stage. The work that was being proposed would look at both options, with and without residential on site. When members have the final report then they would be best placed to decide at that point what they want to do. At this stage members would be limiting their options. Members would also be aware that officers had previously advised the council against limiting the options available to you. Officers were fully aware that there were members who would wish there to be no residential on site, however, as yet the council does not know the costs of the things members would like to see incorporated, nor does this work look at any alternative sites for residential (which form part of the amendment). It was also asked that members consider very carefully whether they believed at this early stage there would be support for the scale of residential development on these alternative sites (when identified) that would be necessary to provide the necessary cross subsidy and also off set the loss of existing uses on those sites. It would create financial challenges, of which members were aware of the council's financial position, but also would create delay because realistically the former can not be done until we have identified and agreed the latter. The officer then clarified with the Chair that for recommendation 3, was the intention for just the decking to be completed and nothing else and recommendation 4, the Brewers Fayer does this not now prejudge the feasibility study that had been agreed to be undertaken at the last item on the agenda. The Chair confirmed that the officers understanding of recommendation 3 was correct and that the feasibility study for the Brewers Fayre would take priority over this recommendation.

The Vice-Chair was then invited to make his comments where he ran through each of the options detailed in the amendment. He confirmed that there should be no residential development on the Regis Centre car park site, instead there should be exploration for this development on other sites such as London Road Car Park and Gloucester Road, Hothampton site. The option to explore the decking of the Regis Centre car park given the expected increase in use from the new Hotel along with the other expected regeneration. And that the feasibility study had now been agreed to be completed. In response to this it was stated that the limits these amendments apply to council should it be approved was not easy to understand, limiting the options available to be considered when agreeing a feasibility study. The chair confirmed that there were a number of residents that did not want any residential development included on this site. There had been a number of grand schemes considered over the years, all of which failed. He stated that he felt that with the refurbishment of the Theatre the amendments would be complimentary to this. A question was raised regarding what

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conversations had taken place with Butlins in reference to the comments made by the Vice-Chair regarding considering Gloucester Road, given that this site was not one that the council owned. The Vice-Chair stated that he did not say residential development would be built on this site and to his knowledge no conversations had taken place with Butlins.

Further comments made by other members of the committee were also not in support for any residential development to be considered on the site. A suggestion was made to preserve the function of the former Royal Hall but not necessarily the building. As it was the space that members wanted to protect to ensure that a multipurpose entertainment/ leisure space. The Chair as proposer of the amendment and the seconder Councillor Needs agreed to have this wording added to recommendation 4.

The Regeneration Lead was then reinvited to re-read the statement provided by the interim Chief Executive and Director of Growth to the committee.

The Chair then moved to the vote on the amendment as amended (below), where it was declared as CARRIED.

- a. The Economy Committee **agrees** to the production of a design feasibility of the Regis Car Park subject to the following:
 1. **There should be no residential development on this site**
 2. **Instead, there should be exploration of cross subsidy for the car park area by using other sites in Bognor Regis owned by Arun to build residential units**
 3. **The option of `decking` the Regis Car Park to be explored given increased usage in the next few years from the refurbished theatre and proposed new hotel**
 4. **The former Brewers Fayre space be preserved with a view to reviving a multi-purpose entertainment / leisure space (the old Royal Hall) in the near future.**
- b. The Economy Committee approves the project brief, **subject to the changes outlined above.**

Having undertaken the vote members of the opposition continued to express their feelings on the amendment having been agreed. The Leader of the Opposition expressed that he believed this was a mistake and would now limit the council to its detriment. This feeling was supported by other members of the opposition and it was requested that the Section 151 Officer provide his comments on the amendment that had been agreed at a future meeting of the committee.

The Chair then undertook the vote for the substantive recommendations that had previously been proposed and seconded.

The Committee

RESOLVED

- a. The Economy Committee agrees to the production of a design feasibility of the Regis Car Park subject to the following:
 1. There should be no residential development on this site
 2. Instead, there should be exploration of cross subsidy for the car park area by using other sites in Bognor Regis owned by Arun to build residential units
 3. The option of `decking` the Regis Car Park to be explored given increased usage in the next few years from the refurbished theatre and proposed new hotel
 4. The former Brewers Fayre space be preserved with a view to reviving a multi-purpose entertainment / leisure space (the old Royal Hall) in the near future.
- b. The Economy Committee approves the project brief, subject to the changes outlined above.

398. BOGNOR REGIS ARCADE UPDATE

The Regeneration Lead provided members with an overview of the report which provided them with an update on the progress of the project. He confirmed that the Council was successful in achieving the Grant that was available from the Brown Field Land Fund and this had now been received. £18,000 per unit was received, the project was now fully underway with project consultants, asbestos removal had been undertaken.

The Chair then invited members for their comments on the report where clarification was sought regarding the figures documented in paragraph 7.1 of the report, in particular the net revenue costs of the scheme of £28,646.00 and this figure was significantly less than the maintenance costs, so could it be confirmed if this figure was the just the interest payments or was it interest and Capital payments. It was confirmed that it was the deficit between the income from the rental and the capital and revenue repayments for the scheme. Due to further detailed financial questions asked, it was suggested that the S151 Officer would be best placed to answer these questions and an answer would be provided outside of the meeting. A query was raised in relation to discussion that was had at a Full Council meeting regarding the shortfall in funds for the repair work needed for the roof and finally, thanks was expressed to Officers for securing the funding and the work already undertaken to this point.

The recommendation to note the update report was proposed by Councillor Yeates and seconded by Councillor Needs.

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399. REVIEW AND UPDATE OF THE ONGOING LITTLEHAMPTON BEACH HUT PROJECT.

The Property, Estates and Facilities Manager advised members that since its meeting in November 2022, Officers had been working to deliver the project in line with the timeline set out by the Committee. He confirmed that planning consent was granted on 10 March 2023 following this, officers had been working to procure the manufacture and supply of the required beach huts. Since drafting the report, the council had reached out to local groups and charities, however interest had been low he confirmed that work would continue to be ongoing on this matter.

The Chair then invited members to make any comments or statements where the following comments and points were raised, the update received was felt to be disappointing, over the 14-year timeframe set out in the report the revenue was expected to be £250 per Beach Hut, this did not show the council's ability to generate revenue well. The figures reported in the appendix to the report were also queried. It was also commented that it was disappointing to hear that there had been a lack of interest seen from local groups and charities. Members then discussed in more detail the value of the beach huts and the area being truly accessible, clarity was sought regarding whether accessible equipment would be provided inside the beach huts, toilet facilities and accessible changing places. One member asked for clarity regarding what made these beach huts accessible, it was confirmed that they would have level access by ramped areas, and they would have larger doors and a larger footprint. There would be no equipment such as hoists inside of the beach huts, the council was currently in the process of installing 8/9 changing places toilets across the district of which 2 will be located just off the Littlehampton promenade. It was stated that it was cost effect to provide the equipment locations in this way but not in each individual beach hut. An explanation on the difference in costs between a standard beach hut and the accessible beach huts was requested where it was confirmed that the costs were dictated by the market.

It was stated by several members that there was now concern that what was being provided was just a larger sized beach hut, which was not what members had in mind when the initial proposal was made to install accessible beach huts.

Before turning to the recommendation, it was proposed by Councillor Gunner and seconded by Councillor Northeast that the wording of the recommendation should have the following words inserted (highlighted in **bold**),

'That it delegates authority to the Group Head of Technical Services to let the three accessible huts to local charities or groups **on the same terms** as set out in paragraph 4.11.'

This amendment was agreed and became the substantive recommendation this was then proposed by Councillor Gunner and seconded by Councillor Northeast.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That it delegates authority to the Group Head of Technical Services to let the three accessible huts to local charities or groups on the same terms as set out in paragraph 4.11.

400. REVIEW AND UPDATE OF THE ONGOING RIVER ROAD GARAGE SITE PROJECT

The Property, Estates and Facilities Manager explained that the report before members was to provide an update on the River Road garage site project in Arundel. It advised that since March 2022 a consultant had been engaged and had prepared an architectural design for the scheme which had been submitted for pre-application planning advice in March 2023. In September 2023 a response to the pre-application was received which set out that the development was permissible in principle, but that the form of the design was not in keeping with the character of the area and would likely be refused if not amended. It also detailed the review completed on the cost and income analysis for the project, this had been necessary as construction, labour and material prices had seen considerable increase since March 2022 when members last considered the project.

The Chair stated he was pleased to see the report before the committee given the feeling from residents since the original decision was made. He then invited comments from members where concern regarding the future of the site was raised, in particular the comments made regarding potential consideration of the disposal of the site, given the councils need to generate income. There was a clear request from members that they wanted to understand what future uses for the site were to be considered. It was confirmed that officers would relook at housing viability options, lease parking options and permit parking was also under consideration. It was stated that if the council were to address the views of the residents of Arundel, then the options considering Parking would be most favourable due to the lack of parking in the area and when considering these options electrical charging points should also be considered.

The recommendations were then proposed by Councillor Nash and were seconded by Councillor Walsh. At this point Councillor Penycate then proposed an amendment to recommendation 2.2, which was seconded by Councillor Lawrence.

*2.2 A further report be put before members reconsidering **financially and environmentally sustainable** the options for the future of the River Road Garages site in Arundel **that excludes the option for short-stay holiday accommodation**, Corporate Work Programme will be updated to show its expected presentation date in 2024*

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Members then took part in a debate on the amendment where it was raised that members had been overwhelmed by contact received from residents of Arundel since the original decision had been made for the site. The review of the project was welcomed and the research that had been undertaken was impressive. It was now clear that the finances for the project as originally agreed were not a viable option and the amendment proposed was broadly supported. Additionally, it was requested that consideration of a scheme involving 4 small retirement apartments, garages and permit parking be included in the options for the next part of the review as this could provide the council with an income for 52 weeks of the year via rents on the apartments and parking revenue on top. Some members of the opposition highlighted that they were not supportive of the amendment for the following reasons, it was felt that the car parking options were not environmentally sustainable, there would be significant cost to include electrical charging points. It was stated that whilst there was understanding regarding the comments received from residents, it was important to balance this against the needs of the council. It was also commented that given the feedback received on the initial decision, was that residents were worried an air B&B could become a 'party house' could consideration be given to 4 small holiday lets. Final comments heard were that members should be careful not to limit options to be considered and reviewed moving forward, "all options should be considered without limit".

As all members of the committee had spoken, the Chair invited Councillor McAuliffe to address the committee before turning to the vote on the proposed amendment which was CARRIED.

The Committee

RESOLVED

2.1 that the project should not proceed in its current form; and

2.2 A further report be put before members reconsidering financially and environmentally sustainable options for the future of the River Road Garages site in Arundel that excludes the option for short-stay holiday accommodation, Corporate Work Programme will be updated to show its expected presentation date in 2024.

After advice was received from the Monitoring Officer the Chair then undertook a vote to extend the meeting by an additional 30 minutes in line with Part 5, Rules of Procedure (Meetings), Section 2, Committee Procedure Rule 8.1. This was then declared CARRIED.

401. OUTSIDE BODIES UPDATE

There were no updates provided at the meeting.

A query was raised regarding the Leader of the Councils representation on the Greater Brighton Economic Board and the West Sussex Board which were believed to be outside bodies for the council.

The Littlehampton Town Action Group representation had also changed as Councillor Walsh was now a representative on this group and he requested for this to be updated.

402. WORK PROGRAMME

Members noted its work programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

403. EXEMPT INFORMATION

Having been proposed by Councillor Nash and seconded by Councillor Walsh.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That under Section 100a (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and accredited representatives of newspapers be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it may involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act by virtue of the paragraph specified against the item.

404. CLARENCE ROAD KIOSK

The Property, Estates and Facilities Manager provided members with and update on the redevelopment proposals received from the existing operator of Clarence Road Kiosk.

Following a debate where members asked questions and received answers from officers, Members noted the report update provided.

(The meeting concluded at 9.03 pm)