

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO AND DECISION OF LITTLEHAMPTON REGENERATION SUB COMMITTEE ON 7TH OCTOBER 2020

PART A : REPORT

SUBJECT: Proposed new commercial pitches on Littlehampton seafront

REPORT AUTHOR: Caroline Gosford DATE: 10 th September 2020 EXTN: x37854 PORTFOLIO AREA: Economy Group, Place Directorate
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

A planning application was submitted for several new commercial pitches on and near Littlehampton Seafront in line with previous instructions from Members.

Development Control Committee has deferred this application and requested that Littlehampton Regeneration Sub Committee consider the proposals and make recommendations to them in respect of the planning application.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Members are requested to recommend to Development Control Committee that

- Littlehampton Regeneration Sub Committee supports the submission of planning application LU/91/19
- Littlehampton Regeneration Sub Committee supports the proposals in the planning application, and the conditioning of the application as detailed within the report in order to support the post-Covid rebuilding of the economy in Littlehampton.
- Littlehampton Regeneration Sub Committee has provided comments on the reasons given by the Development Control Committee for deferring LU/91/19 at their meeting of May 2020 as outlined below in paragraph 1.3 which are included within the meeting Minutes.

1. BACKGROUND:

1.1 History

Part of the Littlehampton Seafront Public Realm Action Plan approved by Littlehampton Regeneration Sub Committee in June 2017 and Full Council in July 2017 was to extend the provision for temporary business pitches in the seafront area to enable seasonal businesses to locate there. The concept of increasing the number and range commercial pitches on the seafront was also supported during the public consultation on the public realm designs.

Planning approval is required for any commercial outlet that is in situ for over 28 days, and

the planning application for these commercial pitches was made to enable the Council to grasp suitable opportunities as they arise, often at short notice. A good example of such an opportunity is the Big Wheel that has been in situ in Banjo Road this summer.

1.2 Overall Aim

The overall aim is to boost the local economy through the enhancement and improvement of the Littlehampton seafront offer for its visitors. This will draw in more visitors, encourage them to stay longer and spend more, thus increasing footfall which will benefit all the businesses located there.

It also fulfils the requirement to increase lease revenue incomes to the Council, and would support the use of the Greens for both small and large-scale events in the post-Covid-19 future such as performances in Stage by the Sea, Screen on the Green, Food Festival, Classic Car Show etc.

1.3 Planning Application LU/91/19

A planning application for 4 sites that do not form part of the covenanted area associated with Harbour Park was submitted in March 2019. There were two long and narrow sites on the Promenade itself, the entire area of Banjo Road coach park and the triangular area at the head of the river where it meets the sea around the pebble seats. All sites are owned by Arun District Council.

The two sites on the Promenade were later removed from the application after internal consultation, however it is worth noting for the future that the Promenade in Littlehampton is wider than that in Bognor Regis which also runs a regular road-train and has several businesses successfully and safely operating on the Promenade. The site plan showing the remaining pitches is attached as Appendix A.

Concerns were raised via planning objections regarding the loss of coach parking and other issues, and a Planning Response was created to answer these objections. It provided more background information about the fact that the businesses would not be there just for an event, or permanently, they would be temporary and likely seasonal, how the businesses would be selected and managed, and proposed solutions to address all issues and other objections raised. This was submitted as part of the planning application in December 2019.

The Planning Response is attached as Appendix B.

Development Control Committee met in May 2020 and considered the Officer Report which recommended approval of the application, and deferred the application on several grounds:

- The desire to have input and views from Littlehampton Regeneration Sub Committee about the application and the uses proposed for the commercial pitches.
- Questions about how many and what type or size of business would go on each site, and safety issues in respect of watersports operators near the river
- Questioning whether any businesses located here would be truly complementary
- Concerns around the loss of coach parking and a review of the latest coach parking figures.

These issues are addressed below under Proposals.

2. PROPOSAL(S):

2.1 Coach Parking

It is recognised that some coach parking is required at Banjo Road until appropriate off-site coach parking provision is identified. The proposal is to use the 10 parallel parking coach parking spaces nearest the seafront for temporary businesses leaving the 10 herringbone spaces plus turning circle available for coaches to use. A drawing of these arrangements is attached as Appendix C. This is the site that the Big Wheel is currently occupying in exactly this configuration.

The 2019-20 coach parking data for Banjo Road by month is attached below and includes all ticket sales whether Pay & Display or RingGo. The tickets could be for a coach or minibus – the tariff is the same.

Ticket sales	Ap 19	Ma 19	Ju 19	Jul 19	Au 19	Sp 19	Oc 19	No 19	De 19	Ja2 0	Fe2 0	Ma 20	Total
Up to one hour	23	16	27	41	34	14	7	6	2	0	0	0	131
Over one hour	2	7	57	157	105	12	0	2	0	0	0	0	333
Overnight	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total	25	26	84	198	141	26	7	8	2	0	0	0	466

This data makes it abundantly clear that even using the highest monthly total of 198 in July 2019, with 20 coach spaces available in Banjo Road this facility is underused.

Looking at the daily ticket sales data for the three busiest months of June, July and August 2019, only on one single day are 20 tickets purchased (20th July) so the coach park was only potentially full to capacity on one day per year assuming that they were all there at the same time. On 2nd August 19 tickets were purchased, and between 15 and 11 tickets were purchased on 4 other days in July. This means that the proposal to use the 10 parallel parking coach parking spaces nearest the seafront for temporary businesses leaving the 10 herringbone spaces plus turning circle would mean that the coach park would have possibly reached capacity on a maximum of 6 days in a year. Two of these days were weekend days where the two coach parking spaces at The Wave leisure centre could have been used if signage was in place to direct coaches there.

The Covid-19 pandemic has radically reduced the use of mass transport such as coaches, and until the pandemic is under control this is likely to continue.

The full coach parking data is available as Appendix D.

The planning application, if successful, could be conditioned that the herringbone coach parking section of Banjo Road cannot be used for seasonal businesses until alternative off-site provision has been identified and all plans/signage/communications etc as described above are in hand.

2.2 Complementary offer

The aim of this planning application is to draw in more, and higher-spending visitors more often for the benefit of all businesses located in this area through offering a wider range and quality of eating, drinking and things to do here. These temporary businesses would be selected to complement existing provision rather than replicate or compete with it. The aim is to raise the quality and offer more modern and healthy food and drink options and

new activities to complement the traditional seaside offer that is currently available. Research was undertaken by officers to better understand the existing offer to ensure complementarity rather than competition. The promenade from river mouth to the East Beach café is 700m (0.42 miles) and there are only a handful of outlets. The current sit-down catering offer is within Harbour Park (some seasonal only) or the Windmill Harvester set back from the seafront, with the East Beach Café at the far eastern end of the promenade, plus there are the take-away catering outlets in the promenade kiosks seaward of Harbour Park. This means that the bulk of the 700m long seafront promenade has no food and drink offer at all. A good quality temporary coffee outlet has recently started trading on the promenade, and further east beyond the East Beach Café, the new Watersports Café is under construction. The current range of catering is limited to a very traditional British/seaside offer, particularly at the western river end where the offer is strongly tailored to families with young children with little choice for higher-spending adults. It is clear from the queues seen in Pier Road this summer which lead to the road being closed to enable safe social distancing that many people visiting the seafront choose to head to the Pier Road outlets for food and drink.

Previously there was a very successful Gin, Prosecco and Pizza Bar on Bognor Regis seafront which drew in a new and more affluent clientele to visit this area. This is the sort of outlet we seek to put onto these pitches. Other alternatives are catering or activities that are not currently available such as vegan/ethnic street food or a paddleboarding operator, all of which would draw and attract both family and younger visitors.

All aspects of the selection, appearance and operation of the temporary businesses would be overseen via a licence managed by Arun DC Property and Estates Department who will also closely monitor noise and litter. This approach worked successfully with the Gin, Prosecco and Pizza Bar on Bognor Regis seafront and drew in new visitors thus benefiting existing businesses by drawing in new potential customers. The operator also set up Beach Cleans and rewarded people bringing in waste from the beach with free food and drink.

Targeted commercial operations would include things like good quality vegan, ethnic and street food and drink options such as a pizza oven, crepes and waffles, specialist sausages, international food, vegan/vegetarian food, gin and prosecco, cakes and pastries, jacket potatoes, seafood, burritos, etc to complement the existing traditional seaside offer, and activities such as paddle-boarding, kayaking, watersports or children's entertainment like face painting. Where there is a safety component such as with watersports, all relevant legislation will be complied with and all risk assessments will be undertaken by the operators who are responsible for safety. The area near the river is part of the RNLI-patrolled beach making this area the safest place for going into the water on the whole beach.

Based on the fact that any planning conditions put into place around the types of businesses to utilise these sites would probably not have included a Big Wheel and it would therefore not have been able to use these sites, we would recommend that no planning conditions restricting the types of business on these sites are put in place.

2.3 Business clusters – Size and type of business

It is almost impossible to give a clear answer as to how many of what type of business would be on each site at this stage as we won't know what businesses will come forward until we advertise the sites, and we cannot do this without planning approval. At least initially, the intention was to handpick a small number of complementary businesses with a maximum of two per site to trial this approach, but both sites are clearly large enough to

accommodate a greater number of smaller outlets. All businesses would operate from good quality temporary or tow-away units with their offer, pricing and appearance vetted by Property and Estates.

Some thought has been given to the siting of commercial units however this is obviously dependent on the size and type of business operation – you can't fit a Big Wheel in the same space as a small catering trailer, and whereas a paddleboard operator would need space for boards, safety gear etc, a children's face painter just needs a chair. A drawing showing potential layouts is attached as Appendix E, however this layout would only work for smaller business units. The Covid-19 pandemic means that while we want to attract people to come to the seafront, we do not want to encourage large gatherings of people, so striking that balance in terms of commercial activity could mean a potentially larger number of very small operators could also utilise these spaces – think face-painter, fortune teller, caricaturist, mime statue, friendship bracelet maker, hair braider. This approach would reduce queuing and thus encourage responsible social distancing.

The Covid-19 pandemic has cancelled festivals and other mass gatherings which are serviced by good quality catering and activity providers, and there have been many approaches by such operators this summer who have had to be turned away. Many of the approaches have been from good quality catering outlets using a variety of different sized trailers with outdoor seating.

What is clear is that opportunities such as the Big Wheel are great for the town and having planning consent in place would mean such short notice opportunities as this and others that we have had to turn down this summer of equal quality and merit could be embraced. If planning conditions were put in place stating, for example, that Banjo Road has to be divided into four pitches as shown on the drawing, we could not have accepted the Big Wheel.

Accordingly our recommendation is that no planning conditions are put in place around the size or number of businesses on each site to retain the greatest possible flexibility to be able to react to changing circumstances. The professional team in Property and Estates that manage such sites routinely liaise with the Economy Group and others within the council when making such decisions.

2.4 How this proposal will improve the economy of Littlehampton

As stated above the main driver for this application is to improve the economy of the Littlehampton seafront area by generating new and more affluent footfall, and more regular visits. This will bring higher turnovers for local businesses both new and existing and this creates new jobs.

The Covid-19 pandemic means that for the foreseeable future, day trips are likely to be preferred to staying trips. Littlehampton benefits from an extensive beach with ample car parking across both the town and seafront area making it an appealing destination for trips to the seaside from the main catchment of south London and southern counties as evidenced over this summer. We know from Tourism South East research that people on a day trip spend less than those staying overnight, so to support the local economy, we need to find ways to encourage people to spend more and come back to Littlehampton more often.

In a way, the timing of this application could not be more appropriate; as the nation emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic the town will need to put its best offer out there to

attract people to come and spend time and money there. This planning application provides the perfect opportunity to broaden and improve the range and quality of visitor services on offer on the seafront. It will raise the profile of the opportunities offered by the seafront greens for future major high-quality new events such as food festivals, classic car rallies etc.

This application is part of the wider strategic plan to reinvigorate and revitalise the town to make it more attractive to visitors and attract new people to come. We have listened to concerns that have been raised relating to the originally submitted proposals and have reduced the number of sites that are proposed.

2.5 Process going forward

If planning approval is granted, these sites will be advertised by Property and Estates for occupation by temporary businesses for Summer 2021, or earlier if there are operators keen to be there beforehand.

The temporary licensing on these pitches will enable the council to see how the business performs and for the business to test the water in Littlehampton, and this may lead to businesses wishing to locate in Littlehampton on a permanent basis. As an example, the Coffee Cup on Bognor Regis promenade is open all year round and is licensed by the Council as a permanent concession.

3. OPTIONS:

To recommend to Development Control Committee that:

- Littlehampton Regeneration Sub Committee supports the submission of planning application LU/91/19
- Littlehampton Regeneration Sub Committee supports the proposals in the planning application, and the conditioning of the application as detailed within the report in order to support the post-Covid rebuilding of the economy in Littlehampton.

OR

To recommend to Development Control Committee that:

- Littlehampton Regeneration Sub Committee does not support the submission of planning application LU/91/19
- Littlehampton Regeneration Sub Committee does not support the proposals in the planning application, and the conditioning of the application as detailed within the report in order to support the post-Covid rebuilding of the economy in Littlehampton.

4. CONSULTATION:

Has consultation been undertaken with:	YES	NO
Relevant Town/Parish Council	x	
Relevant District Ward Councillors	x	
Other groups/persons (please specify) Public, LTC and ADC Members all consulted via the planning application	x	

5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)	YES	NO
Financial	x	
Legal	x	
Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment		
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		
Sustainability		
Asset Management/Property/Land	x	
Technology		
Other (please explain)		
6. IMPLICATIONS: Financial: The planning approval will generate an income for the Council Legal: Licences for each business to operate will need to be produced, however a standard template has been produced and successfully used for similar business activity on Bognor Regis seafront Property: The sites are on Council-owned land		

7. REASON FOR THE DECISION:

To support the post-Covid rebuilding of the economy in Littlehampton

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

[Littlehampton Regeneration Sub Committee June 2017](#)

Appendix A – Commercial pitches Site Plan

Appendix B – Planning Response to address objections raised

Appendix C – Banjo Road proposed layout

Appendix D – 2019-2020 Banjo Road Coach Parking ticket data

Appendix E – Drawing showing potential layout of units at both sites