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Subject to approval at the next Levelling Up Fund Working Party meeting

1

LEVELLING UP FUND WORKING PARTY

1 April 2021 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Cooper, Coster, Edwards, Mrs Pendleton (Substitute for Gunner), Stanley, Tilbrook and Dr Walsh.

Councillors English and Miss Seex were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

[Note: The following Councillors were absent during from the meeting during consideration of the matters referred to in the minutes outlined: Councillor Tilbrook – Minute 1 to 6 (Part) and Councillor Walsh – Minute 6 (Part) to 7].

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

The Working Party

RESOLVED

That Councillor Walsh be appointed Chairman of the Levelling Up Fund Working Party.

The Working Party

RESOLVED

That Councillor Edwards be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Levelling Up Working Party.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence had been received from Councillors Gunner and Thurston.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

4. START TIMES

The Working Party

RESOLVED

That its start times for meetings be 6.00 pm.

5. OFFICER PROJECT PREFERENCES

The Director of Place provided Members with a presentation on the Levelling Up Fund, explaining its main principles, the bidding process and timetable in place emphasising that any bid had to be submitted by 18 June 2021, having gone through appropriate Council approvals.

It was explained that there was a maximum of £20m available from this fund for Arun as it had been put into the priority 2 category. Three projects were then described that could form the basis of the Council's bid. These three projects were:

- The Arcade in Bognor Regis
- The Alexander Theatre and the Esplanade in Bognor Regis
- Littlehampton Public Realm (extension works) and Littlehampton Seafront developments.

These projects were being suggested as the Council had already undertaken a substantial amount of work which could assist in terms of the very tight deadlines that needed to be met. It was highlighted that any bid had to include a narrative around the combined challenges that coastal communities had in relation to deprivation and reliance on tourism and culture. There was also a possibility of a further bid through the Arundel and South Downs Parliamentary Constituency, as each Parliamentary Constituency could have a separate bid, although Arun would also have to work with two other Councils to agree projects and work up shared bids. In view of the timescales in place, it was proposed, at this time, that the Council's bid would be aimed at the Bognor Regis and Littlehampton Parliamentary Constituency, however, if a bid was unsuccessful, the Council could re-bid in the next bidding round.

Areas excluded from this bid would be Rustington Eastwards and Arundel, and Ford, as they fell within the South Downs constituency. Work for any successful bid had to start in this financial year [2021/22] and had to be completed in 2024/25. A key part of the Council's consideration moving forward was that the three projects had to have a symbiotic relationship – a common objective, which could present further challenges. It was emphasised that the Council would need to provide 10% of the funding [up to £2m], as well having support from the appropriate Member of Parliament.

The key points for Members to consider from the presentation provided were:

- How straightforward would delivery be – taking into consideration other parties; permissions [planning and building regulations etc]; timescales and how easy it would be to undertake the required negotiations etc
- What support can be found – securing letters of support for the projects to form part of the bid from partner organisations

- Strategic fit – how do the projects fit within the context of Arun in terms of our own strategies and the strategies of others such as the LEP and GBEB; and
- What supporting documentation could be used

The Chief Executive provided further clarity following his attendance at a recent Webinar on the Levelling-Up Fund. Although the Council would be focusing on the Bognor Regis and Littlehampton Parliamentary Constituency, in terms of other potential Constituency bids, it had been confirmed that there would be no 'double dip' funding available and that the Member of Parliament would decide which authority would become the lead in that area. In relation to our MP, they could only support one bid and that would include anything submitted from WSCC as well, which could become an issue. In terms of the deliverability, Stage 1 was a pass/fail gateway based very strongly on whether Arun could clearly confirm that it could start work by the end of March 2022. Looking at the themes, there were four being Transport (aimed at WSCC); Regeneration; Town Centre and Cultural Investment, though theatres were not mentioned in the initial documentation, it had been made clear, at the Webinar, that theatres would form part of the cultural community projects. Other key points were that bids had to prove that they would have a visible impact on local areas with investment complementing not competing with other local amenities provided.

A question and answer session then followed with the issues raised by Members being summarised below:

- The need for office space in Bognor Regis to not compete with the private sector elsewhere
- The need to pull together a quality bid in a very short timescale and the practicalities of delivering a sound bid
- To consider existing Leases and any necessary consultation
- Concern over kiosks possibly moving (Littlehampton) and consideration of e-gaming attractions in both sides of the District
- The need for fully accessible toilet and changing facilities
- Festoon lighting should be provided along the River Arun instead of the Oyster Pond
- How the 10% Council contribution would be funded
- The need to complete the public realm works to Littlehampton station as the main arrival point to the Town and joining up this work along Beach Road and Surrey Street.
- Discussing proposals for Littlehampton further, the drop-off point for coaches and relocation
- There were elements of concern about pushing the positioning of the kiosks back due to the location of underground containers used by Southern Water [based on the plans shown as part of the Director of Place's presentation] – this would need to be investigated.

Levelling Up Fund Working Party - 1.04.21

Members discussed the need to be able to provide a strong narrative containing cast iron evidence highlighting the benefit of the bid to the community and its link to other visitor attractions. There was some concern raised over the tenuous link for The Arcade and how this could positively associate with the other two possible projects and could be seen to vitally benefit the District as a whole. The need to sell these ideas and consult with the public was highlighted, especially with The Arcade. This was because although it was a clear benefit to the Council and the Town, it was not necessarily a key factor in terms of the overall bid.

Returning to the point that the Council would need to find 10% of the funding, although this money was not readily available, it was supported that for a successful bid with a value of £20m, the Council should do all it could with its finances to support the bid with its 10% contribution. It was also highlighted that the Council's contribution may not be needed until 2024/25 allowing more time to plan for this commitment.

The Chair then had to leave the meeting and so the Vice-Chair took the Chair.

To move these projects further forward, the next stage would be for Officers to provide a 'pick and mix' of ideas which would be individually costed to allow Members to make a further view on their appropriateness to develop further.

Following further discussion, the three Officer projects identified were supported and Officers were asked to develop the ideas further, seeking written support from other parties, so that more detailed information could be provided to the next meeting of the Working Party.

The Working Party having debated where recommendations would be reported to, this being either Cabinet or Full Council, noted that if needed, a Special Meeting of the Council could be convened to debate and agree on the detail of the bid to be submitted.

6. MEMBER PROJECT PROPOSALS

The Chairman then invited Members to outline their project proposals. The ideas put forward were:

- Whilst accepting that no work had been undertaken on the Windmill in Littlehampton, that Officers start work on replacing the Windmill [moving it into the Town Centre] after the bid had been submitted so that in the event that the Council was unsuccessful, a degree of work would have been undertaken so that this project could be considered at a further round of bidding.
- An alternative idea was put forward for a "Climatorium" on the Hothampton Car Park, Bognor Regis, based on a presentation that the Council had previously received, as it was felt to tick many boxes in terms of regeneration and also as it could be classed as a unique visitor attraction, which would be exclusive to Arun. It was agreed that Councillor Coster

would arrange for these proposals to be circulated to all Members of the Working Party now that membership had been confirmed, to allow further discussion to take place at the next meeting.

- Members were reminded that if it was decided to include this as part of the Council's bid, they had to consider the fact that no significant background research had been undertaken and that this had to be taken into consideration in terms of the deadlines being worked to.
- It was felt that the Littlehampton Public Realm project should include, as part of the overall package, outside screens for public entertainment at Clifton Road and to make this a significant public space and to provide a facility that would be vandal and weather proof as this would be a facility that would attract people to the Town. It was agreed that Councillor Seex would circulate these proposals to the Working Party.
- It was outlined by Officers that if the Working Party agreed to pursue these proposals, Officers would need to upgrade and update the previous work undertaken by Consultants which had a total estimated expenditure of £60-£70k. This would include a refresh of the theatre report; a refresh of the seafront report for Littlehampton, looking at the economic benefits as these were key requirements of the fund, and then writing the bid. On the Esplanade, work would have to be undertaken in pulling together costs for this work. The Chief Executive stated that he would seek support for this expenditure probably through the Council's anticipated underspend for 202/21 and would liaise with the Council's Section 151 Officer.
- It was agreed that the Littlehampton railway station could also be looked at for inclusion as part of the Littlehampton Realm work as the overall costs of these elements were small and could be accommodated.

Following further discussion, the Working Party agreed that Officers develop these projects ideas further and seek the written support from other external parties to form overall support and evidence to be supplied as part of the narrative of the bid to be submitted and once agreed.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Working Party

RESOLVED

That its next meeting take place on 21 April 2021 at 6.00 pm.

(The meeting concluded at 8.19 pm)

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