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

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LEVELLING UP FUND WORKING PARTY

21 April 2021 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Walsh (Chair), Edwards (Vice-Chair), Cooper, Coster, Gunner, Stanley and Tilbrook.

Councillor Thurston was also in attendance at 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 9 to 11 (Part); and Councillors Gunner and Thurston – Minute 9 to 12 (Part)].

8. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An Apology for Absence had been received from Councillor Seex.

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

10. MINUTES

The minutes of the Working Party meeting held on 1 April 2021 were approved as a correct record with the Chair confirming that he would sign the minutes when business resumed back in the Council offices.

11. UPDATE FROM OFFICERS ON PROJECT WORK

The Working Party received a presentation from the Director of Place which updated Members on how work was progressing with the three outline projects discussed at the last meeting. It would be for the Working Party to confirm, having received this update, how it wished to proceed in confirming project progression.

The detail of the presentation has been summarised below:

- External consultants had been contacted and asked to progress the projects discussed.
- LDA consulting, who had undertaken the original Littlehampton seafront project work, would be undertaking a refresh of this work. The positive was that a lot of public engagement around the different ideas had already been undertaken. The proposal was to keep the concessions where they were and to look at a new facility at the Banjo Road area. Thought was also being put into whether new changing and toilet facilities linked to that should be considered and how the Council should deal with the existing toilet block at the seafront to either improve its appearance or to relocate it. Disabled access to the beach was also an option that could be

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included in line with the exploratory work being undertaken at Bognor Regis. The final part of this project was looking at the opportunities for the Oyster Pond. The next phase was to write up costings against the different elements so that Members could make a final decision on which out of the list of seafront projects being considered should be included in its bid.

- The architect behind the 2012 report looking at the Alexandra Theatre, Burrell Foley Fischer, would be progressing this project.
- The Director of Place shared with the meeting project plans for the Alexandra Theatre.
- The proposed project formed two phases having the overall intention at Phase II to link the theatre to the pub part of the site [discussions had commenced with Whitbread]
- Phase I was ultimately about linking the High Street, via The Arcade, to the theatre and then to the seafront with links to the project for the Place St Maur [details for the project on that site had been provided to the architect].
- The plans proposed the construction of a glass atrium which would wrap around the Alexandra Theatre providing public access directly into building from the Place. The idea was to provide a featured walk through from the High Street into a 2 storey type glazed front of house atrium opening out onto the Place St Maur as well.
- Phase II would provide front of house facilities such as conference rooms and exhibition space.
- The glass wrap around to the theatre would provide a more attractive facility. The way in which the theatre worked would also be examined by moving its control facilities to another location allowing the theatre to provide more seating and a better overall environment.
- Consultants Bruce Nairne and Scott Marshall would be looking at the economic benefits derived from the proposals; how to develop the overall narrative; and would be considering how best the Council could put forward its bid in time for 18 June 2021 deadline. They had extensive experience in co-ordinating bids of this kind.
- There was a desire to include the Terminus Road project in the bid for Littlehampton
- Further concerns were raised over the inclusion of The Arcade at Bognor Regis as part of the bid. Although there was a benefit that could be highlighted in the narrative around bringing this building back into use, reinforcing its linkage to the seafront and Town Centre, there was also the argument to consider in excluding the arcade and to focus on a simpler narrative instead for Littlehampton and Bognor Regis making them more inclusive places. Members' views were sought on this issue.

In response, the views of the Working Party were:

- It was important to show an even handed approach to both Towns and to work towards parity in the bid submitted.

- There were views expressed that Terminus Road should be included in the bid for Littlehampton making the linkage from the arrival point in the Town [for visitors arriving by train] down to the seafront.
- On the Arcade, it was felt that this project would be seen as a benefit more for the Council rather than for residents and visitors to Bognor Regis. It was agreed that this project did not represent regeneration more income regeneration for the Council. For it to be successful it would require other floors to be added to it making it a too larger project. The inclination was to dismiss the Arcade and focus on the other elements of the bid, especially if they would improve the likelihood of success.
- Why was the proposal from Councillor Dixon on the Climatorium not being proposed at this time? Details had been sent to Members of the Working Party following the last meeting held on 1 April 2021. It was felt that this should be seriously looked at as it was a project that fitted comfortably with the prospectus criteria.
- Concern was expressed over the size of the two phased project for the Alexandra Theatre in terms of whether such a scheme, in its entirety, could be delivered within budget. The understanding was that the schemes to form part of the Council's bid needed to be 'shovel ready', this wasn't.
- Agreement was given to progressing the Terminus Road project as part of the Littlehampton bid recognising that this would become the gateway to Littlehampton and was 'shovel ready'.
- Further concerns were expressed over project delivery and the need to progress projects that were 'shovel ready', not new ideas. Could these projects be delivered on time and within budget and if not what additional resource would be needed to achieve this.
- Looking at the theatre proposals, concerns were raised over the provision of the ice rink. Would this project prevent the ice rink from being erected on the Place St Maur, a vital attraction to the Town.

In response to the questions raised by Members, the Director of Place reassured the Working Party, by sharing the presentation for the theatre project and showing the footprint of the project, that this should not prevent the ice rink from being held on the Place St Maur.

All of the projects were half 'shovel ready', subject to the usual planning permissions. Looking at project delivery, if the Council chose to delay submitting its bid beyond 18 June 2021 to another bidding round, then this would delay the window of delivery and shorten the time in place to deliver projects by the deadline of 2024. It was acknowledged that if the Council was going to attempt these two projects then it would be vital to bring in significant additional resource to project manage the projects in addition to existing resources, as the Economic Regeneration team were already committed to other projects. Any bid submitted would need to include as part of its funding, what would be needed to project manage the agreed projects. It was anticipated that the cost of bringing in consultants could be in the region of £70k.

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Following much further discussion, the views of the Working Party were that:

- The Arcade is not pursued as part of the Council's bid.
- Support was given to focusing on two main bids that would benefit Bognor Regis and Littlehampton equally.
- The latest version of the Alexandra Theatre revamp was felt to be the best presented to Members to date. The glass covered atrium was seen to provide a different way of connecting the Town to the seafront, though there were still concerns over the size of the project and deliverability.
- Projects for Littlehampton should not be linked to Littlehampton Public Realm in view of the Government's attitude towards public realm projects and could jeopardise the bid's success.
- The Working Party was again asked by Councillor Coster to consider the climatorium project which was seen to be an easy project to deliver and was recognised as a powerful regeneration aspect, producing an iconic building adding value and interest to residents and visitors.

The Director of Place re-emphasised some of the key points already covered:

- The Littlehampton project – including Terminus Road as part of the project. The intention was to improve this area to show a greater sense of arrival and then providing an enhanced visitor journey through to the seafront. Tying this in with key aspects of this part of the bid. Improving attractions around Banjo Road would fit neatly in with the broader narrative. This was what LDA would be progressing as the next stage of work by pulling together high level costings.
- It would be vital to build into any bid a substantial contingency fund to cover the increasing cost of raw materials and to oversee any potential issues. Also, as the Council needed to fund 10% of whatever it may be awarded.
- On the Alexandra Theatre, the proposed project's outcome was to improve the theatre – this was part and parcel of the bid as the theatre formed part of the cultural side of the town. The project would improve the look of the theatre and would broaden its range of uses. There would be opportunity, through additional floorspace created, to explore the provision of exhibition space or even as part of Phase II the provision of some sort of climatorium related project.
- The theatre project would provide the quality social space needed to generate income and would provide a massively enhanced ambiance for those arriving at the theatre for shows. Its seating capacity would also be increased; viability for regeneration on this site would be enhanced; there was opportunity to provide a better building overall.
- There was overall agreement not to include the arcade as part of this bid.
- On the climatorium, there was opportunity to consider this as part of the Phase II works for the theatre.

- The Council should submit a bid containing two broad approaches for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton as one whole submission, as debated earlier.
- The Consultants be asked to draft a narrative to accompany these two projects and to provide detailed costings for the next meeting of the Working Party to include contingency costs.

This was agreed as the way forward by the Working Party.

12. TO AGREE PROPOSALS BID PROJECTS GOING FORWARD

The Chair confirmed that this item had been considered as part of the previous item on the agenda.

13. PRIORITY FOR PROJECT GOING FORWARD

It was the Working Party's view that each project for Littlehampton and Bognor Regis should have equal priority and submitted as one overall bid.

It was agreed that the Working Party would wait until its next meeting and would consider first the information supplied by Consultants before attempting to prioritise anything.

The Director of Place asked the Working Party if it could provide a steer in terms of whether the Council wished to become engaged with other bids from other parliamentary constituencies such as the South Downs and Arundel area and Worthing West Constituency. Having received details, it was agreed that the Council should focus solely on its own projects.

Finally, the Working Party agreed a date for its next meeting which was 11 May 2021 at 6.00 pm.

(The meeting concluded at 7.35 pm)

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