

Local Economy & Place Policy Development Advisory Group
6 NOVEMBER 2023

Present: Councillors: Ruth Fletcher (Chair), Mark Baynham, Jon Campbell, Paul Clarke, Nigel Emery, Tony Hogben, Alex Jeffery, Joanne Knowles, Richard Landeryou, Colin Minto and John Trollope

Also Present: Councillors: Dennis Livingstone and David Skipp

15 **NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The notes of the meeting on 11 September were received.

16 **HILL CEMETERY LODGE**

The Head of Property and Facilities presented the Group with a proposal for Hill Cemetery Lodge. The options included adapting the property to a 4-bed accessible home, to be let as affordable housing, or a 3-bed option. It was not proposed to sell the property. The 4-bed proposal was preferred, as this type of unit is not currently delivered by the market, or registered providers. The Group were advised on the upgrades to energy efficiency that were required. The cost of the adaptations and energy efficiency improvements had increased, the cost of which would be covered by a virement. A value engineering exercise had taken place with the contractor. The 4-bed option provided the best return, and open market value.

Two tenders had been received, and Officers were satisfied with the detail and value of the bid.

Members asked questions about the different options and risks. The Head of Property and Facilities confirmed that the let would be managed by Horsham District Homes, which would not enable tenants to use Right to Buy. The option to use the property as temporary accommodation was not preferable, due to increased movement in tenants, and management issues.

It was acknowledged that the cost of the works was not insignificant, but there was a preference to retain the property, as it is located at the entry point of an active cemetery and as such, Horsham District Council would prefer to retain control of the property.

17 **BUSINESS SURVEY RESULTS AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY**

The Head of Economic Development advised the Group on the outcomes of the Business Survey and economic statistics. This included working trends, sector breakdown, business space needs and access to broadband. A facilitated workshop in relation to the Economic Strategy would be held, and Members were asked to advise on their preference as to timing.

Members discussed the importance of access to broadband for businesses, and the issues experienced, particularly in the rural areas. The Head of Economic Development advised that many of the rural areas had not been assessed as commercially viable for extension of broadband services, by the providers. It was confirmed that some businesses have invested individually, but this came at a significant cost.

The Group discussed the wine industry, and the risks with seasonal employment that would be experienced. It was suggested however that the tourism opportunity could be substantial.

Questions were raised around the size of businesses, and whether there was an understanding of the turnover of microbusinesses, and how many expand into small businesses. The Group were advised that an analysis could be undertaken as to the proportion of microbusinesses that were towards the larger end of the scale (i.e., up to 9 employees), however the data received could not be analysed as to growth.

It was suggested that the financial value of businesses was important, as well as the total numbers. It was further noted that there had previously been a focus on business parks, however increased working from home had meant that this was now a significant part of the economy.

18 **UPDATE ON SHARED PROSPERITY FUND**

The Group were advised that funding from Government had been received for the Shared Prosperity Fund, which had to be used within a short timescale. All funding had been allocated, and internal projects were underway. There was a risk regarding the external projects. The Head of Economic Development confirmed that funding had been allocated to a wide range of projects.

19 **UPDATE ON RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND**

The Head of Economic Development advised that there was £270,000 of funding available in the current year, of which £150,000 had been spent. There were several projects in the pipeline, and it was expected that the full amount would be allocated. Members were asked to promote the grant scheme, and it was noted that for the funding in Year 2, the team were seeking a higher proportion of matched funding from businesses.

A range of applications had been received, including solar panels, electric vehicles and improvements to accessibility. Successful applications included a sound business plan, demonstrating an understanding of the implications. Businesses were invited to discuss their proposals with the Economic Development team, if they required support. The opportunity to bid for funding to provide broadband was discussed, and it was confirmed that consortium bids may be submitted, however the grants were limited to £75,000.

20 **UPDATE ON BISHOPRIC & CARFAX SCHEMES**

The Corporate Project Manager provided an overview of the project stages and timelines, and advised that there was a capital funding allowance for two design schemes with delivery of the Bishopric/Worthing Road project. The internal and community engagement was outlined, and Members were asked to provide feedback on the option of further community engagement at Stage 3.

21 **CARFAX COBBLES REPAIR WORKS - UPDATE**

The Corporate Project Manager advised that West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) had approved a programme of works to repair the cobbles in the Carfax. The scope and timetable had been discussed, and WSSCC had been advised of the importance of conducting works after the Christmas period. A road closure would be required, and the Communications team at Horsham District Council would ensure this was publicised. The works were expected to last between 15 and 20 days beginning in January, however Members would be advised once this was confirmed.

22 **FORWARD PLAN EXTRACT FOR THE LOCAL ECONOMY & PLACE PORTFOLIO**

The Forward Plan extract was noted.

The meeting closed at 6.52 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN