

NORTH WALSHAM HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE WORKING PARTY

Minutes of the meeting of the North Walsham High Street Heritage Action Zone Working Party held remotely on Wednesday 03 June 2020 at 2.00 pm

Committee Ms V Gay
Members Present: Mr R Kershaw
Mr E Seward

Officers in Attendance: The Project Enabler, The Head of Economic and Community Development and the Democratic Services Manager

20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the Economic Growth Manager

21 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th December were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

23 REVIEW OF TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Head of Economic & Community Growth introduced this item. He explained that the Working Party had been established to oversee the application for the funding of the project and that, as the project was now moving forward, the remit of the Working Party was changing to that of overseeing the implementation phase. The terms of reference had been updated to reflect this. Cllr E Seward said that he supported the changes.

RESOLVED

To recommend to Cabinet that the revised terms of reference are approved.

24 UPDATE ON THE GRANT APPLICATION

The Head of Economic & Community Growth explained that the full grant had been awarded. The Council had been formally notified and the paperwork had been received. He added that the decision to match fund the award had been made by Council on 20 November 2019 and the paperwork would be signed and returned shortly.

The Head of Economic & Community Growth went onto say that Historic England had three criteria that the Council needed to satisfy to draw down the funding. He currently had no concerns about them as they were mainly procedural. He then

added that Historic England understood the issues and challenges caused by Covid 19 and were prepared to be flexible if required. He then outlined the three conditions;

1. A decision must be made regarding the sustainable use of the Cedars, including costed works to the repair of the building. The Head of Economic & Community Growth said that it would be acceptable to reach a decision 'in principle', as HE accepted that circumstances had changed since the pandemic.
2. To seek a commitment from the County Council (NCC) regarding the Network Improvement Strategy at the earliest opportunity. This involved looking at the main market place in the town and working with NCC to undertake the public realm work. The Project Enabler said that this was an area of the scheme that HE were quite excited about. The Head of Economic & Community Growth added that all that was required at this stage was to 'seek a commitment' from NCC. Cllr V Gay asked who suggested this wording. The Head of Economic & Community Growth replied that it was HE's suggestion. He added that HE were taking a flexible approach and this included the funding allocations per year – particularly in relation to this aspect of the scheme and were really keen to see if the town-scaping improvement part of the project could be brought forward at all.

Cllr E Seward referred to Cedar House. He said that there had been some communication from Wetherspoon's indicating that with the onset of the pandemic, they were not currently in a position to proceed with the purchase of the site. He said that it should be acknowledged that it was very unlikely that pubs would be expanding their property portfolios at such a challenging time and a different scenario should be explored. He referred to the One Public Estate proposal and said that more information was needed on how it would work – particularly regarding costs. Cllr Seward then referred to the public realm works in and around the main market place. He said that he had not been involved in any further conversations with NCC but was happy to raise the issue if it would help.

The Project Enabler updated the Working Party on the arrangements for the payments of the grants. She said that they could be submitted quarterly. As the start of the project had been delayed due to the pandemic, it was likely that it would be September 2020 at the earliest, although Historic England had indicated that they would be flexible. The Head of Economic & Community Growth added that there was a meeting with HE scheduled for Friday 5th June to discuss and consider such issues. The Chairman said that Cabinet were very supportive of progressing the project and asked that Members were kept updated regarding the outcome of Friday's meeting.

Cllr Gay commented that Historic England seemed very keen on the project. The Project Enabler confirmed this, saying that they seemed excited about the possibilities and had offered support regarding research for certain aspects of the town's history.

Cllr Seward said that the contract should be signed as soon as possible. There were various options available regarding the repair of Cedar House that could be explored. He concluded by asking for an update on the removal of the portakabins from the site. The Democratic Services Manager agreed to contact the Estates and Assets Strategy Manager for a response.

The Conservation Design & Landscape Team Leader commented on Cedar House. He said that previous experience of a regeneration project in North Walsham had shown that considerable skill was required in 'juggling' the planning requirement with

any need for listed building consent. Marrying up the grant funding side of the project with the timing of planning applications would be crucial.

The Project Enabler then outlined the final condition:

3. Where possible there should be engagement with the property owners to raise awareness of the scheme and to gather and share project data.

She said that this was something that officers were very aware of. There were several absentee landlords which made it challenging. She added that it was likely that the building improvement section of the scheme would be pushed back slightly due to the recovery phase from the pandemic taking priority. The Head of Economic & Community Growth added that, on the plus side, the Council had recently engaged with many property owners throughout the period of disruption caused by the gas replacement works. Cllr Seward commented that hopefully the work that had been undertaken regarding business grants and applications following the pandemic, would hopefully make contact with property owners easier.

The Chairman asked whether the high street was now open and back normal, as far as the gas replacement work was concerned. The Head of Economic & Community Growth replied that it was, apart from a few setts that still needed to be replaced.

Cllr Seward commented that there was still some work to be undertaken in terms of completing works to the high street. He said that regarding parking charges and spaces, it might be beneficial to tie it in with social distancing measures in the town so there was not continual change from one system to another. It was important that when the free parking in Vicarage Street and Bank Loke stopped, it coincided with the provision of free spaces in Bank Loke to cover for the loss of off-street parking.

25 INDICATIVE PROJECT BUDGET

The Head of Economic & Community Growth began by explaining that the funding was, as previously discussed, £975,000 grant with the same amount in potential match funding from the District Council. He said he had every expectation that there would be some funding from private landlords and it was hoped that there would be additional funding from the public realm works. He then shared a summary of the indicative budget for the four years, broken down by income stream and individual project. He explained that there would be some 'flexing' as the projects progressed and that the majority of the funding was weighted in years 2/3 of the scheme. The Project Enabler added that Historic England had been quite prescriptive about the allocation of the budget – requesting a 10:40:40:10 split over the 4 years of the project. However, there were some schemes such as the Church Approach and public realm work that were being brought forward to the early years as they were seen as 'quick wins'. Historic England were also keen that more of their funding was used in the early years as there were other national projects where this may not be possible.

26 GOVERNANCE

The Chairman asked Members whether Overview & Scrutiny Committee should be kept updated on the progress of the project. Cllr V Gay said that she agreed with this suggestion. Cllr Seward said that an update could be provided to the Committee once the project was up and running. The Head of Economic & Community Growth explained that this agenda item related to project governance rather than the Council decision-making process and was a requirement of the bid submission. The Project

Enabler then shared a diagram outlining the proposed governance structure for the project. The Head of Economic & Community Growth said that there would be engagement with a North Walsham Stakeholder Group and a Project team. The latter would be made up of relevant NNDC and NCC staff and would be split into two levels – a core team and an advisory team. The Stakeholder Group was currently quite small but could be increased as required to include representatives from the church, for example. Cllr Seward commented that there should be a representative from the Chamber of Trade on the stakeholder group. The Head of Economic & Community Growth then referred to the Cultural Consortium which was essentially an umbrella group, engaging other groups and smaller groups as appropriate. The Project Enabler explained that Historic England wanted this group to be standalone and Bob Wright would be leading on this. In response to a query from Cllr Gay, the Head of Economic & Community Growth confirmed that it would be appropriate for individuals to join the Cultural Consortium.

27 DRAFT PROGRAMME

The Project Enabler began by outlining the programme development, which was broken down by project. She said that recruitment was currently underway for a Project Manager and it was hoped to conduct interviews for the position in early July.

She then talked through each of the projects in turn, outlining the key aspects of each and explaining the timeline for the beginning and end of each project. She said that for the 'Repairing and restoring of historic buildings' there was the possibility of additional support and resources from Historic England, at no extra cost.

The Conservation Design & Landscape Team Leader asked whether Historic England had expressed a view on the existing Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA) and whether a refresh had been suggested. The Project Enabler replied that this issue had not been discussed in depth yet. Cllr Gay added that the existing CAA was 10 years old and it would be reasonable to assume that Historic England would want to see a new one in place to protect the work done under this project.

The Conservation Design & Landscape Team Leader then referred to repair grants and queried whether there would be an even split across all of the properties or whether the historic status of some buildings would lead to a more generous grant being offered to attract interest. This approach had been taken during previous regeneration schemes and had worked well. The Head of Economic & Community Growth acknowledged that this suggestion could work well.

Cllr Seward referred to the proposed building programme. He said that some of the traders in the town had done quite well during the pandemic, with others suffering very badly. He said that they should not all be considered to be equally affected and that there was a possibility that some of them may be able to contribute to the funding of the repair and restoration of buildings. Cllr Seward added that in terms of quick wins, some of the entrances into the market place might be easier to address quite early on, particularly the entrance at the back of St Nicholas' Court and the Bank Loke car park.

The Project Enabler then spoke about the public realm aspect of the project. She said that Church Approach could be dealt with early on. It was only a small part of the overall scheme but could make a substantial difference visually and could also help with buy-in from the local community. Cllr Seward said that it might be worthwhile making contact with the owners of the Black Swan as this was another entrance that

could be a quick win and it would be helpful to find out what their intentions were regarding the future of the building.

The Chairman said that starting on the public realm works should give the surrounding businesses confidence in the project.

The Project Enabler then referred to the Community engagement aspect of the project. She said that this would have to be re-thought to take account of social distancing requirements. There was a stakeholder map which identified approximately 65 groups in the community to work with. As far as monitoring and evaluation would go, Historic England's preferred approach was to evaluate across all of the projects, so consideration would be given as to the best way to do this. Regarding heritage surveys and capacity building, there was a lot of scope there and it was intended to see how this evolved. Digital skills could be a good place to start as there seemed to be some gaps here.

The Head of Economic & Community Growth he agreed that there was a quite a lot that could be done to improve the digital skills of businesses in the town and this had been highlighted during the pandemic. Regarding signage around the town, he said that this was something that would be developed and built on as some work had already been undertaken with the Market Towns Initiative.

28 ISSUES AND RISK LOG

The Project Enabler provided an overview of the risk register that was submitted alongside the funding application. It was currently being reviewed following the pandemic. The biggest risk currently was the recruitment of the Project Manager. It was important that the right person was appointed.

Most of the risks had already been discussed and officers were aware of any likely issues and were monitoring them closely.

The Head of Economic & Community Growth added that it was critical that staff resources were available as well as the funding. There was currently a high level of work emanating from the pandemic which was using resources from the Economic Growth team. This would need to be monitored carefully. Risk mitigation was crucial to the success of any project and 'live' risk log would be maintained.

Cllr V Gay commented that a member briefing could be a good way of keeping Members informed about the project. She added that it was really important that there was a written 'thread' capturing decisions and ensuring transparency as the project progressed.

Regarding the risk log, she asked whether this was on the overall Council's risk register or whether this was just project specific. The Head of Economic & Community Growth confirmed that it was currently project specific but would be captured on the Council's risk register as the scheme progressed.

The Chairman commented that he supported a Member Briefing and agreed with the points about transparency.

29 COMMUNICATIONS

The Head of Economic & Community Growth said that consideration needed to be given regarding communication about the project and how it could be promoted effectively. There would be a communications strategy which would be brought forward at some point. There was still a lot of work to do and again, staff capacity would be crucial.

Cllr Gay said that the inclusion of a member of the Communications team in the Mammoth Marathon project had been crucial to its successful promotion. The Project Enabler agreed and said that the Communications Team would be involved in these meetings going forward.

30 NEXT STEPS

It was agreed that the next meeting should be shortly after the interviews for the Project Manager post, in the hope that an update could be provided on an appointment. The Democratic Services Manager agreed to circulate possible dates.

The meeting ended at 3.34pm

Chairman