

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 on Tuesday 22nd September remotely via Zoom at 2.00 pm

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

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

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

2 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th August 2020 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

4 GENERAL / HISTORIC ENGLAND UPDATE

The Project Manager said that the national programme (69 schemes in total) had been formally launched. She thanked the Communications Team for their support and it had received good coverage in the press. There were now some dedicated pages on the Council's website providing information on the project. Historic England had put officers in touch with lead officers on the other projects in the region, which included Great Yarmouth, Swaffham and Lowestoft. The Chairman commented that he was pleased to see that the media output on the project was well received but said it was important to maintain consistency and focus. Cllr V Gay added that she had appreciated the well-worded description of North Walsham.

The Head of Economic and Community Development said that there had also been an announcement at the weekend regarding funding for the cultural programme. He said that this would take place later in the overall programme as the focus would be on the tangible outcomes initially. The Project Enabler confirmed that although the funding for the cultural programming had been applied for separately, the project would run alongside the main scheme, adding that Historic England wanted to see a legacy from the cultural programming. There had been a view initial meetings to ensure that an application was ready for the December deadline for the first draft. Cllr E Seward asked when each tranche of applications would be open. The Project Enabler said that this was a new scheme for Historic England and they had decided on a single application that would cover the four year period. She confirmed that there was an umbrella of 8 community organisations that made up the cultural consortium and Bob Wright was the nominated lead.

Cllr Seward said that he accepted that part of the remit was to develop talent and expertise within North Walsham and he wondered whether anything further would be done to progress the previous work that had been undertaken to mark the Peasants' Revolt on an annual basis. The Project Enabler replied that although it had been cancelled this year due to the pandemic, she understood that plans were underway for it to take place in 2021. She added that although it was not possible to fund an existing event, it could be 'woven' into the current programme. The Head of Economic and Community Development queried whether it needed to be linked to a specific month as the Tourism Sector Support Grant scheme could be a possible funding stream if it could be held out of season.

5 PROGRAMME DELIVERY UPDATE

The Project Manager shared a Gant chart which provided an overview of the programme and likely timescales. It was a 'living' document that would be populated as the scheme progressed.

Community Engagement

Community engagement was key to the success of the project and ran through the full four years. She said that it was not a Council project but was very much driven by the community. Referring to the community stakeholder group, she said that it had been established to pull the overall project bid together and consideration was no being given as to how this could be developed. It was likely that there would be some initial community engagement workshops and regular surveys would be conducted.

Building Improvement Scheme

The additional funding from the LEP had had an impact on the timeline and it was intended that work would be undertaken on developing a process for delivering the funding for various conservation projects, probably through a grant application scheme that would come on-stream in 2021. The background work would be to identify potential buildings that could be helped by this part of the project.

Cedars House

Heritage architects had been appointed to undertake work. Condition and site surveys were underway and once the full condition of the property was known and the likely cost of reparation and bringing it back into use then a scoping study would be undertaken.

Town Centre Place-making

This was the biggest part of the project and included improvements to the street-scape and accessibility. The brief was currently being worked on and tendering and procurement would be the next stage. There would be a significant element of consultation regarding this aspect of the scheme.

Historical Research and Skills Development

Historic England were very keen on this and had identified North Walsham as a research focus for the region. It did overlap with some of the work being undertaken by the Cultural Consortium. HE had offered to provide support with some of this, including the services of their lead photographer who would run a photography

workshop with Paston College students, although this was likely to be pushed back to Spring 2021.

Interpretation and Signage

This would commence much later in the project as it linked in with other elements of the project that would need to commence first.

The Chairman said that he wanted to emphasise the importance of involving local businesses, including new businesses. It was a two-way conversation and should involve listening carefully and adapting accordingly. This was particularly important as it was a joint effort and would require financial contributions from businesses so buy-in to the project from the outset was crucial.

Cllr V Gay said that the historical research and skills element of the project was very important. She said that there was a strong desire on the part of North Walsham to have more visitors and a good insight into the history and background of the town could drive this. She also said that she wanted to stress the importance of conservation skills. The District had 81 conservation areas and it was challenging to find people with the right skills to undertake work and this was an area that needed to be promoted and developed.

The Economic Growth Manager said that the business community was a key stakeholder in the project and it should be recognised that in the longer term the connections and engagement generated through involvement in the scheme could be a catalyst for future projects. Support for the Chamber of Commerce or a new group that would continue long term was vital as was working with them to support new ways of doing business via the digital economy. Officers were looking to work with businesses on these elements imminently and also to encourage them to get involved with the wider project.

The Chairman said that several of the new businesses that had recently come into the town had been keen to get involved with the project.

STAKEHOLDER GROUPS AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Head of Economic & Community Development explained that the terms of reference template shared with members was generic and could be adapted by stakeholders to reflect their specific group. He said that by establishing stakeholder groups, it was hoped that a seamless dialogue with interested parties could be achieved and that they would provide a sounding board on key issues, adding that the ultimate aim was to leave a long-term legacy for engagement between community groups in the town. Further discussion would be needed about representatives on each of these groups before the next meeting. He concluded by saying that the Council would work in close partnership with the stakeholder groups but the direction of the groups would be very much driven by them. He said that principal organisations in the town would be invited to get involved along with 'hard to reach' groups.

Cllr Gay said that the whole project had been borne out of community support and concord and it was right that they should continue to play a key part in the delivery phase.

The Chairman said that a rolling forum would work well, particularly in light of the pandemic. It was important to be clear on the parameters of the project to ensure

that expectations were managed. However, a two-way dialogue would ensure this.

The Project Manager said that positive discussions had already taken place with Paston College and the High School and a meeting was scheduled with a local youth group.

Cllr Seward said that the Market Towns Initiative (MTI) was a joint Town Council / Regenerate North Walsham initiative and they had worked very well together. Regarding the parameters, it was important to explain that the work would focus on the conservation area of the town centre. He supported the involvement of the school and college as this would bring the views of young people to the fore.

QUICK IMPROVEMENTS

The Project Manager said that work was underway on Cedar House and the next focus would be to establish the brief for the townscape improvement work. Once the design work was done for the whole area then the separate elements would be implemented.

Regarding prioritisation, Church Approach and the adjacent businesses would be looked at early on. Other areas would be identified once the design brief was complete. Quick wins were important because they demonstrated a commitment to the project.

The Project Enabler said that infrastructure was key to the town-centre place-making as social interaction was very important and this had been demonstrated by an increase in the number of people using outdoor seating at cafes and restaurants during the pandemic. Any work that could be done to identify areas that could facilitate this would be beneficial.

The Chairman agreed, saying that the work in the precinct supported by the MTI scheme, clearly showed an increase in social interaction and if this could be replicated then it would have a very positive impact. Cllr Seward agreed that the precinct was a good example of how a better environment could be created for people to socialise and eat. He added that any work on Church approach should ideally be undertaken during January to March before the summer season started.

The Chairman said that the next two items of business contained confidential information and proposed that the meeting went into private business:

RESOLVED

“That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to the Act

PRIVATE BUSINESS

Cllr Seward outlined the current position regarding Black Swan Loke and options were discussed. The Estates & Asset Strategy Manager was asked to make further enquiries.

The Project Enabler said that it would be hard to achieve the proposals as part of the Heritage Action Zone project but agreed that it did link in well with the scheme.

A discussion ensued regarding possible 'quick wins' in relation to the boundary of the Mitre Tavern Car Park. The Head of Economic and Community Development suggested that this could be fed into the appropriate stakeholder group for input. The Project Enabler commented that an initial piece of work should be undertaken to establish where people accessed the town – or the 'desire lines', she added that it could fall within the place-making aspect of the scheme. Cllr Seward said that he was supportive of sounding people out and suggested that the Town Council and Regenerate North Walsham were asked to put together a proposal for this part of the town.

AGREED

To formally request that North Walsham Town Council and Regenerate North Walsham put together a proposal for improvements to this part of the town.

The Project Enabler added that there was also the Business Improvement Scheme and this area could be considered within this.

Cedar House

The Working Party had a discussion about options regarding the future of Cedar House, including the possibility of a wedding venue and events. Cllr Gay agreed that options for use as an event venue should be explored. The Head of Economic and Community Development said that the condition survey would be key – particularly the condition of the barns. A design brief should be undertaken so that all of the proposals could be explored. Then a feasibility study could be produced and the business case outlined.

The Project Manager said that the scoping study could look at the possibility of a wedding venue, offices, cafeteria facilities and what could be built at the back. The Project Enabler added that it was important to have an overview of what could be done with the space. Historic England wanted to see the site used as a whole so the barns should be considered too.

7 ISSUES AND RISK LOG

The Project Manager said that work was ongoing relating to the analysis of risks. She would provide an update to a future meeting of the Working Party.

8 COMMUNICATIONS

The Communications Officer was in attendance. The Chairman thanked her and the team for all the work they had done so far. She replied that the media coverage had been very well received and there had been no negative feedback.

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Cllr Seward suggested that a district council member from one of the neighbouring villages could be included in the stakeholder groups.

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place when there was sufficient

progress to report.

The meeting ended at 15.45pm

Chairman