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BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

CABINET

**Held on Thursday, 9 February 2012 at 9.30 am in
Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Dereham**

PRESENT

Mrs L.S. Turner
Mr J.W. Nunn (Chairman)
Mr S. Askew

Mr P.D. Claussen
Mr M.A. Kiddle-Morris
Mr A.C. Stasiak (Vice-Chairman)

Also Present

Mr T. J. Jermy
Mr J.P. Cowen
Mr R.G. Kybird
Mr P.J. Duigan
Mrs P.A. Spencer

Mr S.G. Bambridge
Mrs D.K.R. Irving
Mr W. R. J. Richmond
Mr M. A. Wassell

In Attendance

Mark Stanton
Terry Huggins
Mark Stokes
Julie Britton
Margaret Bailey
Ralph Burton
Kevin Ward
Kevin Cooper
Rupert Kitchen
Mike Whitfield
Robert Scholes

- Economic Development Manager
- Chief Executive
- Deputy Chief Executive
- Senior Committee Officer
- Senior Accountant Capital and Treasury
- Strategic Property Manager
- Growth Programme Manager
- Director (Building Partnerships Ltd)
- LSI Architects
- Davis Langdon
- Rossi Long Consulting

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18/12 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

An apology for absence was received from William Smith.

19/12 DECLARATION OF INTEREST (AGENDA ITEM 3)

The Chairman, the Executive Member for Planning & Environmental Services and Mr R Kybird declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 due to them all being Members of the Moving Thetford Forward Board.

Mr P Cowen declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 by virtue of his profession as an architect in practice.

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20/12 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 4)

Mr G Bambridge, Mr P Cowen, Mr P Duigan, Mrs D Irving, Mr T Jermy, Mr R Kybird, Mr W Richmond, Mrs P Spencer and Mr M Wassell.

21/12 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 6)

The arrangements for the next ordinary meeting on Tuesday, 14 February 2012 were noted.

22/12 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (AGENDA ITEM 7)

RESOLVED that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of the Act.

23/12 THETFORD RIVERSIDE REGENERATION PROJECT (AGENDA ITEM 8)

Following introductions, Members were provided with a detailed presentation by the External Project Team. An update was also provided by the Council's Senior Accountant for Capital and Treasury.

Kevin Cooper from Building Partnerships gave an overview of the proposed scheme. This was followed by a detailed brief from each of the representatives from the External Project Team.

The Overview & Scrutiny Commission Chairman felt uncomfortable about Members being asked to sign off the agreement before consultation. It was explained that this was a sign off in principle and there was potential to have a second sign off period.

It was noted that once the agreement with the proposed tenant had been signed and planning permission had been obtained Breckland Council would be obligated to build and complete within a timeframe of 18 months following consent. The 'longstop' date was August 2014.

All dates would be reviewed and agreed once the lease to occupy had been signed by the proposed tenant. Having this tenant in place would attract a variety of businesses to the site.

The key risks were highlighted and an overview of the major constraints was provided. The Project Team was striving to mitigate and minimise the inherent risks of the site. All risks would try and be eliminated to ensure that this project was deliverable and ultimately create a development that would enhance Thetford.

An archaeological desk study had been carried out as well as three geotechnical surveys and the development would be built in consultation with English Heritage. Further archaeological investigations were pending.

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A flood risk assessment had been developed in conjunction with the Environment Agency and would be developed further once the scheme progressed.

A number of questions were raised about the proposed tenant. Members were reassured that the occupier would generate a great deal of income into the local economy and would attract other businesses due to the tenant being classed as a major occupier.

Mr Jermy, a Ward Representative for Thetford and the Leader of the Opposition Group, asked what affect this particular occupier would have on the regeneration of the town. He highlighted the fact that many shops were standing empty and therefore could not surmise how this proposed development related to the wider town centre. Mr Cooper explained that this type of tenant would not attract retail use to the site – its main target was food and restaurant style businesses and would not take away the demand from other retail users. Members were informed that the owners of the adjacent site were already considering putting more capital investment into their site if this proposal went ahead.

In response to a question about whether case studies in relation to demand had been carried out by the proposed tenant, Members were informed that the tenant had carried out its own research and was aware that there was a demand for such business.

The Economic Development Manager reported that the feedback received from visitors and residents was that this particular area needed stimulation.

Kevin Cooper advised that the benefit of attracting such an occupier to the site was that it was a large group and therefore would be classed as a low risk tenant.

The Executive Member for Localism, Community & Environmental Services reminded Members that when the duelling of the A11 was completed this would attract more businesses to the area and such a tenant would become busier in future.

Mr Kybird, also a Ward Member for Thetford and a Member of the Town Council was pleased that such an operator was prepared to come to Thetford.

The Chairman agreed and felt that such a business would entice others to the town making Thetford a top heritage destination.

The Overview & Scrutiny Commission Chairman thanked the Project Team for their presentation. He had no doubt that this site had to be developed by Breckland Council as commercial developers would be put off by the site's constraints. Thetford had had a dreadful reputation for many years – beautiful buildings that had been demolished in the 60s had been replaced by flats and sprawling housing estates and the legacy being left to our children was pretty poor. To embark on a new development in the town would be an opportunity to leave a legacy that

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future generations of Thetford could be proud of. This was the reason he felt that the public consultation should take place before any agreement was signed off. The public could have different ideas to Members and their thoughts needed to be considered. The Overview & Scrutiny Chairman supported every comment that had been made by the Thetford Members.

The Growth Programme Manager reassured the Cabinet that the Project Team would be very happy to carry out the consultation as and when required. The design was evolving rapidly and it was their intention to talk to stakeholders before going out to the public. Mr Kybird said that he would prefer the Team to talk to local people first with the assistance of the planners rather than with the planners' insistence. The Chairman agreed with this point and suggested that the indicative plans should be shown to the Town Council first as the scheme needed to be right for the regeneration of the centre of Thetford. Various rooms could be made available over a period of a week to 10 days for the Project Team to display the 3D images on screen. Mr Kitchen explained that the 3D model was accurate to about 50mm therefore it would be very good for massing but not so good for detail; however, he would ensure that it was available on the Website.

The Project Team was informed of a Town Council Planning meeting scheduled for 7 March 2012.

The Executive Member for Planning & Environmental Services reminded Members of the Dereham regeneration that had attracted several successful businesses.

Mr Bambridge felt that all Members should have a very clear idea of what was being proposed and urged the Team to ensure that all drawings were easily available.

The Overview & Scrutiny Commission Chairman felt that the Bridge Street elevation would be crucial and key to the whole project.

The Executive Member for Assets & Strategic Development agreed with all the aforementioned points and suggestions and how it was signed off did not matter. As the project evolved the Team would consult some more.

The views of Thetford Town Council would be sought forthwith.

It was agreed that the consultation should take place prior to the planning application being submitted so that all comments could be taken on board.

Members were then provided with a detailed financial update which included technical accountancy issues, exit strategies, funding and rental streams.

The financial risks were quite high as it was classed as a regeneration project and not an investment opportunity. Construction costs and design and build contracts were discussed. Contingency costs were also

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debated and it was felt that a greater amount of money should be put to one side for contingencies as building costs were difficult to control.

Referring to external works, the Overview & Scrutiny Commission Chairman felt that the materials should not only be robust but must be right and costs should not be cut for such works.

In closing the debate, the Chairman reminded Members that the forthcoming sign off would be the start of no return and therefore it was imperative to find out, before sign off, whether Thetford Town Council was supportive of the scheme. Clarity was also required on some financial matters.

It was agreed that a Cabinet meeting should be held before the sign off date by which time the public consultation should have been carried out and any issues outstanding should have been resolved.

Options

See report.

Reasons

See report.

RESOLVED that a further Special Cabinet meeting be held before the sign off date of 21 April 2012 to ensure that the matters below have been carried out:

- 1) alternative delivery models be explored; and
- 2) consultation be had with Thetford Town Council and the residents of Thetford.

It was further **RESOLVED** that subject to the above and subject to due diligence being completed:

- 1) the Agreement to Lease be signed off;
- 2) the funding as requested be released; the
- 3) the grant from Norfolk County Council Infrastructure fund be accepted subject to acceptable Heads of Terms;
- 4) the Audit Committee be commissioned to monitor the contract and any financial risks associated with the project.

The meeting closed at 11.25 am

CHAIRMAN