



Moving Thetford Forward
The Local Delivery Vehicle for Thetford
Growth Point

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD

Held on Wednesday, 11 March 2009 at 10.00 a.m. at Level 8, Breckland House, St.

Nicholas Street, Thetford

Present (Voting Members)

Cllr William Nunn (WN) (Chairman)
Cllr Jennifer Chamberlin (JC)
Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen (SCA)
Cllr Paul Claussen (PDC)
John Connolly (JCo)
Graham Copsey (GC)
Giles Drake-Brockman (GB)
Cllr Brian Iles (BI)
Cllr Bob King (BK)
Cllr Robert Kybird (RGK)
David Napier (DN) (Observer Role)
Jo Pearson (JP)
Cllr Tony Poulter (TP)
Cllr Ann Steward (AS)
Alec Witton (AW)

Representing

Breckland Council
Norfolk County Council
Breckland Council
Breckland Council
Thetford Business Forum
NHS Norfolk
Forestry Commission
Norfolk County Council
Croxton Parish Council
Thetford Town Council
Chairman, MTF Officer Group
Local Business
Brettenham & Kilverstone Parish Council
Breckland Council
Land Representative (non-conflicting)

Present (Non-Voting Members)

Natalie Beal (NB)
Owen Burnett-Jenkins (OBJ)
Paul Crick (PCr)
Phil Daines (PD)
Susan Glossop (SG)
Ray Johnson (RJ)
Richard Kay (RKay)
Tim Leader (TL)
Martin Peckitt (MP)

Breckland Council – Growth Point Team
Norfolk County Council
Norfolk County Council
Breckland Council
Thetford Town Council
Breckland Council
Breckland Council – Growth Point Team
Breckland Council
Breckland Council

In attendance

Jodie Canham (JCa)
Rob Leigh (RL)
Jim Smith (JS)
Elaine Wilkes (EW)

Breckland Council – Growth Point Team
Breckland Council (Marketing & Communications)
Forestry Commission
Breckland Council (Committee Services)

Apologies for Absence Received

Ed Chambers
Cllr Evelyn Collishaw
Cllr Daniel Cox
Cllr Steve Dorrington
Andrew Egerton-Smith
Stephen Faulkner
Mike Goulding
Mary Marston
David Potter
Neil Stott

Thetford Town Council
Norfolk County Council
Norfolk County Council
Norfolk County Council
NHS Norfolk
Norfolk County Council
English Partnerships
GO East
Inspire East
Keystone Development Trust

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12/09 INTRODUCTIONS AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting

No declarations of interest were made.

13/09 MINUTES AND ACTIONS (AGENDA ITEM 2)

(a) Board Meeting – 28 January 2009

- (i) Thetford Healthy Town (Minute 4/09) – TP said he found the various references to “programme management”, “programme manager” and “programme initiation document (PID)” unclear. RKay explained that the overall programme was still in the process of being developed. The first stage document (the PID) had been submitted to and approved by the Department of Health and the full Programme was now being worked-up.

In answer to a further question, RKay explained that NHS Norfolk was responsible for running the Programme but this Board would oversee it from the strategic perspective and its links to other MTF projects.

- (ii) Local Transport Project (Minute 2/09(a)(ii)) – PCr reported that the Croxton Road scheme was fixed to start in late September and works would take eight weeks.

14/09 GROWTH POINT TEAM UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 3)

RKay presented the report. The following items were discussed:

- (a) Thetford Area Action Plan (TAAP) Preferred Options and associated Sustainability Appraisal – BK was concerned about the challenges being made to the Core Strategy and what effect this could have on the TAAP if changes were made to the Core Strategy at the Public Examination. The issue of the buffer zone for the stone curlews was a particular concern.

TL advised that the Core Strategy was felt to be as robust as possible, taking account of the expert advice received and having the backing of the RSPB and English Nature. The issue now had to await the outcome of the Public Examination. It was questionable whether there was any benefit to be gained from deferring the TAAP to await the results of the Public Examination of the Core Strategy.

BK also referred to the fact that a major issue for people was that of development to the north of Thetford and while it was stated the issue was not finalised, no other options were being given. What would happen if the Core Strategy was found to be unsound? He noted that there was to be another survey undertaken of the north of the town.

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TL responded that the advice given meant there was no other option. If the Core Strategy was ultimately found to be unsound by the Inspector, then there would have to be a fundamental review of development around Thetford. The Council had taken the best advice it could. While there was a challenge regarding the issue of stone curlews, the Council took comfort from the support given by the experts in that field.

DN highlighted the importance for the Public Inspection to take account of the effect of the Core Strategy and the proposed buffer zone on education and regeneration in the town, as he felt the experts consulted would have no knowledge of these issues. The MTF Learning Group had submitted a strong letter of representations on these concerns.

TL stated that advice would need to be taken on how the buffer zone would affect different types of development, for example the proposed college, to identify if there was a sound basis to challenge the buffer zone from the educational perspective through the Public Examination process.

In acknowledging that the buffer zone was a significant issue, TP made a suggestion to take a two-pronged approach, with preferred development to the north and a fall-back position for development on a north/south-east split basis. If the fall-back position came into play, the issue of a link road would arise again.

JC reiterated that the Learning Group had submitted a robust response to the Core Strategy arguing the case of the impact of the buffer zone on educational needs of the town. The need to make a decision regarding the Thetford Forum proposal was also highlighted.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the suggestion to consider developing an alternative, fall-back, strategy was supported.

TL / RKay

- (b) Communications – TP acknowledged the positive press reports but reported that some people had said they had not received leaflets and had not known about the public meetings. It was explained that the events had been advertised in the press and About Thetford magazine but it had not been practical to leaflet every house. Information had also been put on the website.

BK said some people had asked why development was permitted on the Sainsbury's site if the buffer zone prevented development. RKay replied that development could proceed if it was on the urban edge but development could not increase into the zone area nearer the birds.

15/09 BUS INTERCHANGE UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 4)

PCr and OBJ presented the report, which outlined the options available on how this project might be taken forward. The timescales and costs given in the report were indicative only.

In discussing the options, the point was made that any development

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would have to work with the fabric of the existing Listed Building and that the development potential of the site was limited.

Preliminary design work would be needed to enable more accurate costs to be given before a decision could be made. A final decision on whether or not to proceed with any options would ultimately be dependent on the cost of the scheme and how it could be funded. Currently, the only funding earmarked was for land purchase.

A member asked whose main responsibility it was to provide a bus hub. OBJ explained that the expectation came from the MTF initiative, not only for a transport hub but also for the development reliant on that. However, Breckland had been looking at refurbishment of the existing bus station over many years. There was no statutory obligation on the County Council to provide a bus station. The only obligation was to provide for stopping points for public transport buses to set down and pick up passengers.

It was noted that the County Council had no budget for design work but that the MTF Business Plan showed there was currently uncommitted budget available of £500,000. A suggestion was made that some funding could be allocated for preliminary design work to be carried out, provided the County Council would underwrite those costs if the scheme did not proceed. OBJ suggested a budget of £50,000 would be sufficient to allow the design work to be done but he would need to liaise with NPS to confirm that a feasibility study could be produced by May and he would also need to confirm the County Council's agreement to the underwriting of the design costs.

RGK made the point that this project unlocked the proposals for the proposed Sixth Form and Community College scheme (otherwise referred to as the 'Thetford Forum') and had been strongly supported by the public. DN concurred with this.

RGK referred to the need for a structural engineer's report on the Listed Building and RJ advised that some preliminary work in this regard had already been done. He would liaise with the Historic Buildings Officer (Andrew Gayton).

AGREED that

- (1) up to £50,000 funding be allocated to Norfolk County Council for the production of sketch plans, including costs, to be agreed in consultation with Breckland Council;
- (2) payment of costs for the sketch plans to be subject to itemised work receipts;
- (3) the sketch plans to give a robust assessment of Options 1, 2 and 3 as outlined in the report;
- (4) the sketch plans to be submitted to the MTF in May 2009;
- (5) the project to be led by Norfolk County Council, subject to NCC giving an indemnity to underwrite the £50,000 funding in (1) above should the scheme not proceed.

OBJ / RJ

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16/09 'THETFORD FORUM' SIXTH FORM AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE (AGENDA ITEM 4)

The report on the Bus Interchange project also highlighted that the Thetford Forum was highly dependent on that project proceeding.

JC stressed the importance of the Board making a decision on whether the Forum project was to proceed if funding structures were to be put in place.

RJ explained that since the Board's last meeting, he had commissioned a draft feasibility team sheet with timescales to enable work on a submission to the LSC to be made by the end of the calendar year for funding to be agreed.

Planning permission needed to be obtained and consultants would need to be appointed by 1st April 2009. A Programme Manager would also need to be instructed.

Up to £500,000 would be needed to enable plans to be submitted to the LSC. Overall scheme costs were estimated at £25 - £30 million.

JC added that the project was not solely aimed at the 14-19 agenda but also for lifelong learning. The project included provision for a 6th Form centre, which would allow the existing 6th Forms to be transferred from the High Schools, thus allowing those schools to expand to meet their other needs.

There was a need to define what the exact components of the development should be, as that would determine what the costs would be and how the scheme could be funded. It was confirmed that LSC funding would be limited to the educational elements only and County Council funding would be for the Library. Any other uses would need to be funded from other sources.

JP recommended that a feasibility brief be produced in the same way as the previous item.

JCo expressed his support for the scheme but said it would be important that the development should have all-year round activities, so that the town did not end up with a seasonally empty site.

RJ stated that there was a need to determine what space would be available on the site over and above that required for the college use, as this would need to be commercially viable.

DN advised that he had sought confirmation that the identified LSC funding was still available. Although he was reasonably confident that it was, he did not think it was necessarily guaranteed. JC stated that the LSC had given a priority to Thetford, both at local and regional level.

It was suggested it was feasible to use the Board's current unallocated capital budget to fund the costs of preparing the scheme plans, provided an indemnity could be agreed between the scheme's partners to share the costs of underwriting the scheme in the event it did not proceed.

Upon being moved by JP and seconded by JCo, it was

AGREED that

- (1) £500,000 capital funding be allocated for the production of a planning application and supporting information to enable the submission of the scheme application to the LSC by the end of the calendar year, subject to agreement by the partner authorities giving an indemnity on an agreed share basis to underwrite the scheme in the event it does not proceed;
- (2) RJ be asked to establish an officer working group to take the matter forward.

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RJ

17/09 IMPROVING THE ENERGY EFFICIENCY OF EXISTING STOCK AND REDUCING FUEL POVERTY – A PROPOSAL (AGENDA ITEM 5)

NB presented the report, which outlined proposals for a scheme to look at needs and to improve the energy efficiency of the housing stock in Thetford.

While members were sympathetic to the idea of what was being proposed, they felt there was conflicting evidence about what was involved and what was needed. Not every householder would want to have works carried out to their homes but the opportunity should be given for people to raise the standards of their home if they wished.

It was noted that Broadland District Council was carrying out an aerial thermal imaging study of the area and the Chairman suggested it would be useful to obtain information from the results of that study.

AW felt that the typical layout of homes, particularly terraced houses, offered limited scope for cavity wall insulation due to the levels of glazing in homes.

RJ advised that the Breckland Housing team worked closely with private landlords, as well as Registered Social Landlords, to make use of existing improvement schemes. The principles proposed in the report were supported but the question was how best to target a scheme to where it was needed. The scheme needed to be simple and to show what a householder could save by carrying out different types of work.

In conclusion, it was agreed that a pilot scheme should be drafted for the Board's consideration. It was also proposed that the scheme needed to demonstrate how it linked to the MTF Vision and Objectives. If there was no firm link, then it was suggested the scheme should not proceed.

AGREED that the Breckland Strategic Housing Team and Flagship Housing be asked to work up a specification and costs for a pilot scheme for submission to the MTF at its June meeting, together with details of what other funding would be available for use. The report should also confirm how the project is linked to the MTF Vision & Objectives.

NB

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18/09 MTF BUSINESS PLAN – DRAFT (AGENDA ITEM 6)

RKay presented the draft Business Plan for the Board's comments. The final document would be brought to the next meeting for approval.

It was accepted that Key Objective 1: Thetford Area Action Plan Masterplan was governed by the planning system, with costs associated with its preparation and evidence base. MTF would need to fund this.

The main objective for the MTF was Key Objective 2: Investment and Master-planning Strategies for the Town Centre and Thetford's Existing Estates. There was a lot of work to be done under this objective, to determine what was feasible and viable, what was desirable and achievable, and to identify the cost to take schemes forward.

A lot of ideas had come forward over the last year, not all of which would ultimately be right or desirable. These ideas had not yet been discussed in detail to enable them to be prioritised for the Board's consideration.

A suggested approach was put that the principal funders involved should identify their top three priorities and how they should be funded, with recommendations being submitted to the next meeting.

AGREED that

- (1) each of the principal MTF Funders (Breckland Council, Norfolk County Council, Flagship Housing, Housing & Communities Agency, Department for Communities & Local Government, Thetford Town Council) be asked to prioritise their top three projects from the draft Business Plan and identify how they were to be funded;
- (2) the Officer Group to look at any potential add-ons;
- (3) a report back be made to the next meeting with recommendations from (1) and (2) above for the Board's consideration.

TL / RKay

19/09 LINKS TO THETFORD FOREST - PRESENTATION(AGENDA ITEM 7)

GB gave a presentation to the Board on the work of the Forestry Commission and the links to Thetford Forest.

The presentation covered the following areas:

- Forest operations
- Environment
- Recreation & Tourism
- Funding
- What makes Thetford Forest important to Thetford
- Making the Difference for Thetford

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The presentation highlighted the location of the Forest with other county and regional green infrastructure and growth areas, which offered important opportunities to both the Forestry Commission and Thetford and the Breckland area for tourism and recreation growth. It was important that the MTF did not overlook these connections in its future planning.

A number of ways in which access to the Forest from Thetford could be developed were illustrated, including the concept of 'green bridges', and other circular routes.

The Forestry Commission was very happy to work with the MTF but was not looking to build more trails at the present time. Importantly, while the Commission was willing to host facilities, it should be noted that it did not have the finances for maintaining them. The Forestry Commission received funding via Defra for basic estate management only. Environmental and recreational duties had to be funded from other sources. While High Lodge had sufficient visitors to enable it to pay for itself, forestry trails had a high maintenance cost.

The Chairman thanked GB for his very interesting presentation.

20/09 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 10)

- (a) Skatepark – JP asked about progress of this project. RJ reported that a site had now been identified. It would not provide for competition level use but would be a facility for the youth of the town. A potential site had also been identified that would satisfy a competition standard skatepark.
- (b) Employment Growth – BK sought information on how many companies were expected to come to the town and how many jobs would be created under the planned growth. RJ said that information was not available at this stage. The agreement for the Thetford Enterprise Park site was close to completion and a number of firms had expressed interest. However, it was not possible for the authority to stipulate how much employment should be created on any given site. The Council could enable development by providing serviced sites but was dependent on the market taking up sites. RJ added that once the land was in the Council's ownership, it would then be possible to put advertising signs on the site.

The meeting closed at 12.45pm