



Moving Thetford Forward

***The Local Delivery Vehicle for Thetford
Growth Point***

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD

Held on Thursday, 14 May 2009 at 2.00 p.m. at Level 8, Breckland House, St. Nicholas Street, Thetford

Present (Voting Members)

Cllr Ivor Andrew (IA) (substitute member)
Martin Aust (MA)
Cllr Jennifer Chamberlin (JC)
Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen (SCA)
Cllr Paul Claussen (PDC)
John Connolly (JCo)
Cllr Daniel Cox (DC)
Mike Goulding (MG)
Cllr Robert Kybird (RGK)
David Napier (DN) (Observer Role)
Jo Pearson (JP)
Andrew Egerton-Smith (AES)
Cllr Ann Steward (AS)
Alec Witton (AW)

Representing

Croxton Parish Council
Flagship Housing
Norfolk County Council
Breckland Council
Breckland Council
Thetford Business Forum
Norfolk County Council
Homes & Communities Agency
Thetford Town Council
Chairman, MTF Officer Group
Local Business
NHS Norfolk
Breckland Council
Land Representative (non-conflicting)

Present (Non-Voting Members)

Natalie Beal (NB)
Owen Burnett-Jenkins (OBJ)
Ed Chambers (EC)
Tim Edmunds (TE)
Trevor Holden (TH)
Susan Glossop (SG)
Ray Johnson (RJ)
Richard Kay (RKay)
Tim Leader (TL)
Chris Nelson (CN)
Martin Peckitt (MP)

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

In attendance

Jodie Canham (Jca)
Mark Fretwell (MF)
Samantha Goodwin (Sgo)
Rob Leigh (RL)
Michael Spicer (MS), Architect
Elaine Wilkes (EW)

Breckland Council – Growth Point Team
LSP Officer, Breckland Council
Breckland Council – Growth Point Team
Breckland Council (Marketing & Communications)
NPS (for agenda item 7)
Breckland Council (Committee Services)

Apologies for Absence Received

Cllr Evelyn Collishaw
Paul Crick
Cllr Bob King
Cllr William Nunn
Cllr Tony Poulter
Mark Stanton

Norfolk County Council
Norfolk County Council
Croxton Parish Council
Breckland Council
Brettenham & Kilverstone Parish Council
Breckland Council

Cllr Paul Claussen – in the Chair

Action by

21/09 INTRODUCTIONS AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting and introductions were given.

AES declared a personal interest at minute 24/09 below as Chairman of Flagship Housing.

22/09 MINUTES AND ACTIONS (AGENDA ITEM 2)

(a) Board Meeting – 11 March 2009

The minutes of the Board meeting held on 11 March 2009 were received and noted. The following matter arising was discussed:

- (i) Thetford Area Action Plan (TAAP) (Minute 14/09(a)) – RKay reported comments received from Cllr Tony Poulter who felt that the wording of this minute in regard to a fall-back position in relation to the buffer zone issue was unclear.

Members confirmed their understanding that from a practical point of view, if the main development option should not proceed, then the proposed alternative, fall-back position would come into play, as stated in the minute. The minute was accordingly confirmed as correct.

RKay added that a fuller report on progress of the Thetford Area Action Plan would be submitted to the next meeting of the Board.

(b) Officer Group Meeting – 22 April 2009

The minutes of the Officer Group meeting held on 22 April 2009 were received and noted.

23/09 CHARLES BURRELL HUMANITIES SECONDARY SCHOOL - REDEVELOPMENT OPTIONS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

This item was deferred.

24/09 FLAGSHIP HOUSING GROUP VISION (AGENDA ITEM 4)

A presentation was given by MA (copy slides appended).

The presentation concerned affordable housing issues that were of a shared interest to the partners of the MTF Board. MA explained that the traditional approach was for affordable housing to be delivered through housing associations. He felt that a more innovative approach could deliver more.

Action by

With regard to the planned growth for Thetford, there was a danger that the existing estates could fall behind. Therefore, Flagship wished to put forward a proposal which could offer a collaborative and holistic approach to delivery of affordable housing through a single management organisation (SMO) structure, which could cover both new developments and existing estates.

Flagship had commissioned Keystone Development Trust to carry out a survey of existing residents on proposals for the future with a view to commissioning a Masterplan for the redesign of the existing estates (for completion by the end of the year). In this regard, there were three proposals for which the Board's support was sought:

- a) A jointly funded scheme with Breckland Council to develop a Masterplan for the redesign/redevelopment of car parking and unused areas on existing estates.
- b) To obtain legal advice on the viability of setting up an SMO, jointly funded by Breckland Council and Flagship Housing.
- c) The establishment of an affordable housing delivery group, perhaps in partnership with other authorities.

In response to questions, the following points were noted:

- There was currently no financial advantage in buying-back housing units on the open market. Government housing policy and funding had been aimed at the delivery of new housing. Mixed tenures on housing estates were felt to be beneficial and current planning policies supported that. Residents themselves also wanted mixed tenure housing.
- The proposal was envisaged to include community centres in new developments and existing centres could be incorporated by agreement.

The Board noted and thanked MA for the presentation but agreed to consider Flagship's proposals set out in the presentation as part of the next agenda item.

25/09 MTF PROGRAMME PLAN (AGENDA ITEM 5)

The report was presented by TL.

A summary of the core programme projects was as set out in paragraph 4 of the report. Details of provisional capital and revenue funding, plus fuller information on the core projects list, were contained in Appendices A and B to the report.

The Board was asked to confirm whether or not any other projects needed to be included and, if not, whether the programme was approved to proceed.

Action by

If to be approved, the Board's attention was drawn to the shortfall in funding, which was significant so far as revenue funding was concerned.

The town centre proposals were felt to be the key issues, together with the issue of other revenue funding to support the capital projects. The challenge would be to achieve some good, big capital projects. In this connection, TL suggested questions on which the Board needed to be satisfied were whether the land use plan was compatible with the overall vision for Thetford and whether the Programme Plan was ambitious and exciting enough.

JC highlighted the lack of any culture or heritage projects in the core programme. TL advised that if details of suitable projects could be provided, they could be incorporated into the plan.

JC

TE referred to the relationship of the programme to the prospects for jobs and the economy of the Thetford Enterprise Park and AES endorsed the need for the plan to be attractive to inward investors, since there would be competition from other areas.

TL confirmed he was happy to add to the list but the Board needed to bear in mind that it would need to secure and agree the funding needed.

AS explained that the projects in the plan were supported by a lot of work which formed the evidence base for the programme and that the report concentrated on the funding issues. The Board was now getting to the stage where commitments to projects would need to be given to enable them to start.

TL confirmed that marketing of the Enterprise Park had already commenced.

MG added that funding requests to the HCA were considered individually on the merits of each business case.

Members were conscious of the need to keep townspeople engaged and encouraged about the prospects for the town and its future, and that people wanted to see a timed agenda of projects.

MA asked the Board whether it supported the proposals put forward by Flagship Housing in the preceding item (Minute 24/09 above).

AGREED that

- (1) the MTF Management Team be charged to discuss the programme plan with the partner authorities and agencies with a view to securing in principle agreement to funding of projects and to report to the next meeting with a prioritised programme plan and associated project timetable;

MP

- (2) in principle support be given to Flagship Housing to explore the proposals for the establishment of an SMO and to investigate with the HCA the potential for the establishment of a consortium of housing associations to participate and invest in the provision of new housing.

Action by

MA

26/09 THETFORD HEALTHY TOWN PROGRAMME UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 6)

The report was presented by CN, who informed the Board that the Department of Health had informally confirmed its approval of the Programme Plan by email received the day before. CN thanked everyone involved for their contributions in enabling the project to reach this point, where the programme could now start to be delivered.

RGK asked about the role of the town's GPs, which did not appear to be apparent in the programme. CN advised that progress on GP involvement had been dependent on agreement of the Programme Plan and that this would now be progressed through the delivery stages of the programme.

CN also informed the Board that discussions were taking place as to his successor and the future management of the programme upon his forthcoming departure from the post of Interim Project Manager by the end of May.

The Board extended their thanks and appreciation to CN for his work on the project to date.

AGREED that

- (1) the final draft of the Thetford Healthy Town Programme Plan be endorsed;
- (2) the Programme will be delivered through a set of projects and interventions under four "strands" as follows:
- A Enhancing knowledge and understanding
 - B Work on infrastructure and policy to support health
 - C Work with local communities to foster a culture of healthy lifestyles
 - D Project management and administration

CN

CN recorded his thanks to all the members of the Growth Point team for their hospitality and support during his time at Thetford.

27/09 THETFORD NEW BUS INTERCHANGE (AGENDA ITEM 7)

OBJ tabled a report at the meeting on the proposed options and costs for the new Thetford bus interchange and very early sketch design options were presented by Michael Spicer, Architect, NPS Group.

Action by

The report outlined the background leading to the present position with the project. The proposal provided for project design and management to be led by Norfolk County Council, reporting through the MTF Board.

Three design options were proposed:

Option 1 – Cost £2.51 million. This option included:

- Building conversion of the former listed building warehouse, with ground floor only occupied by bus station
- All hard surfacing, including off-site highway works
- Canopies
- Concourse edge fencing and automatic gates at bus stands
- Real time passenger information system and automatic ticket machines
- CCTV installation
- Landscaping areas
- A number of assumptions in the cost estimate to allow for, amongst other things, site excavation and regarding, electrical sub-station, archaeological site investigation, ground contamination etc.

Option 2 – Cost £2.34 million. As option 1 but **excluding**:

- Off-site highway works outside outer boundary
- Real time passenger information system and automatic ticket machines

Option 3 – Cost £1.97 million. As option 2 but **excluding also**:

- Canopies
- Concourse edge fencing and automatic gates at bus stands
- CCTV installation

The costs of these options were in addition to land assembly costs.

Option 1 was largely based on the successful design of the Norwich Bus Station and the Mildenhall Bus interchange was shown as an alternative comparison model. The Norwich Bus Station was also used as the basis for estimating costs.

Option 1 offered the optimum solution. Option 2 was a less pedestrian-friendly solution and option 3 offered a basic solution.

The conversion of the listed building would involve a lot of work. It was proposed that only a part of the ground floor would be required for the bus station ticket office/information area. The remainder of the building

would be refurbished to basic standards for letting. The estimated cost for making the building safe was £700,000.

RJ noted that the entry and exit points differed from the earlier Mott MacDonald plans, resulting in a larger site area being required. OBJ explained that the revised designs took account of the new requirements to allow for school bus needs to serve the planned Thetford College Forum and increased pedestrian use at the lower part of Minstergate. These had not been factors when the original scheme had been drawn up.

OBJ also explained that further work to ensure suitable links between the bus station site and the railway station and that for the college forum needed to be done.

By unanimous vote, it was

AGREED that

- (1) in order to meet the needs of a growing Thetford to 2026, the 'Option 1' design specification for a new bus interchange be agreed as the preferred option;
- (2) the MTF partners agree, in principle, to underwrite the cost of providing the new bus interchange (including the securing of land) up to a maximum of £3.5 million, which comprises £0.3 million contribution from Norfolk County Council and £3.2 million from CLG Growth Point Funds;
- (3) Officers should attempt to reclaim a substantial element of the aforementioned underwritten £3.5m, either prior to or post completion of the project. Such reclaimed sums will be explored (a) over the coming months by all public sector partners from their own resources and (b) from the forthcoming Thetford Area Action Plan "Developer Contributions via a Tariff" policy (see Draft Policy TH17). In the case of (b), this is subject to the draft Tariff Policy being tested through the statutory planning processes, including an appropriate, fair and viable contribution being set within that policy towards 'bus improvements' in Thetford. Any funds reclaimed via (a) or (b) will be returned to MTF for subsequent spend on MTF agreed projects; and
- (4) subject to a final decision by the Board and ratification by the accountable body (i.e. Breckland Council), the Norfolk County Council (Department of Planning and Transportation and NPS) be appointed to deliver the design and project management of the bus interchange.

28/09 GROWTH POINT TEAM UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The report was presented by NB.

AGREED that

- (1) the October MTF Board meeting date be changed to Thursday, 19 November 2009 at 10.00 a.m.

Action by

RJ / OBJ /
MP

Action by

- (2) the nomination of an Infrastructure Champion to replace Cllr Dorrington be considered after the local elections on 4 June;
- (3) subject to the above, the report be noted.

29/09 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 9)

- (a) Thetford Enterprise Park – In answer to a question, RJ advised that EEDA funding was anticipated to be confirmed the following week. Active marketing of the site was proceeding and discussions were taking place with some prospective companies.
- (b) Development in Buffer Zone – IA sought clarification on the position regarding development in or adjoining the stone curlew buffer zone. TL explained that any development must not adversely impact on the special protection area. If a planning application could prove there was no adverse impact, it may be granted permission but a lot of detailed evidence would be required.
- (c) LSC Funding for Thetford College – TH reported on a very positive meeting held with Christopher Fraser MP and Sion Simon, Under Secretary of State for Further Education, to discuss the question of LSC funding for the proposed Thetford College. The Minister had expressed his support and had undertaken to press the case with his ministerial colleague responsible for the funding in question. The Board was pleased to note the encouraging position.

The meeting closed at 4.10pm