

Report to: Exmouth Queen's Drive Delivery Group



Date of Meeting 25th January 2021

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Review date for release N/A

Exmouth Queen's Drive – Future Resourcing

Report summary:

At the first Delivery Group meeting of 15th October 2021 the Service Lead – Place, Assets & Commercialisation set out in the introductory Briefing Note that as and when Members have made a decision on how they wish to take forward the Queen's Drive site, it would be necessary to consider how we will resource the project moving forward, either through Officers and / or appointed consultants, skillset dependant partly on the nature of any scheme to be taken forward. Members were informed that there was no longer capacity within the Place & Prosperity Team to take this project forward – it becoming clear that this wasn't now a case of simply marketing the site as per the January Cabinet decision. Also, since that January Cabinet decision, a new Team Structure at the beginning of 2020 and responsibility for taking forward a suite of other place & prosperity focussed projects, priorities had by necessity moved on, the importance of this other work being key in terms of both supporting wider economic recovery and in terms of management of the Council's assets ensuring place & prosperity opportunities are realised.

With two Delivery Group meetings having now taken place, discussions with individual Members and contact from interested parties, we are now beginning to see early indications that further engagement will be needed before decisions can be made on the best uses for the site and the resulting work then needed to deliver such a scheme. This work has the potential to be really positive but also resource hungry.

This report addresses the proposals for resourcing the Queen's Drive project over the coming 2 years and makes a recommendation that 2 posts be appointed to on fixed term contracts but that these posts look wider than just the Queen's Drive project, focussing on Place & Prosperity interventions in Exmouth generally. The existing 2 project officers would then be in a position to continue in their new District wide roles without those other projects being adversely affected by having to refocus on Queen's Drive.

Recommendation:

That the Delivery Group recommend to Cabinet:

That up to £200,000 be made available from the Business Rates Pilot Reserve for a Development Surveyor and an Engagement / Project Officer for a term of 2 years, dedicated to moving forward a suite of place & prosperity based projects in Exmouth and to include Queen's Drive.

Reason for recommendation:

This has been discussed with the Leader and with the Economy & Assets Portfolio Holder and the report asked for to enable the Delivery Group to consider this proposal as a way of resourcing the project moving forward.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action
- Corporate Services and COVID-19 Response and Recovery
- Democracy and Transparency
- Economy and Assets
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities

Financial implications:

The financial details are contained in the report and members are referred to section 1.11 of the report.

Legal implications:

There are no specific legal implications requiring comment.

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#):

Priorities (check which apply)

- Outstanding Place and Environment
- Outstanding Homes and Communities
- Outstanding Economic Growth, Productivity, and Prosperity
- Outstanding Council and Council Services

Report in full

1.0 Background

- 1.1 At the first Delivery Group meeting of 15th October 2021 the Service Lead – Place, Assets & Commercialisation set out in the introductory Briefing Note that as and when Members have made a decision on how they wish to take forward the Queen’s Drive site, it would be necessary to consider how we will resource the project moving forward, either through

Officers and / or appointed consultants, skillset dependant partly on the nature of any scheme to be taken forward. Members were informed that there was no longer capacity within the Place & Prosperity Team to take this project forward – it becoming clear that this wasn't now a case of simply marketing the site as per the January Cabinet decision as per the resourcing plan early this year. At that stage the project was moving from one which was resource intensive on Officers, to being a marketing procedure, albeit a complicated and stepped procedure, driven by external agents.

- 1.2 Also, since that January Cabinet decision, a new Team Structure has taken affect at the beginning of 2020 with the two Officers previously dedicated to this project (now the Project Manager for Place Prosperity and the Place Prosperity Officer) responsible for taking forward a suite of other place & prosperity focussed projects both utilising the Council's own assets but also interventions such as the Reopening High Streets Fund, One Public Estate and other such place making and prosperity type interventions across the District. The Team are now becoming increasingly involved in projects that sit within the pipeline of projects that sit in the Team Devon Economic Recovery work. The Officers in question had committed circa 75% plus of their joint capacity into the Queen's Drive project, but since January 2020 this has reduced to circa 10%, focussed almost exclusively on helping prepare for the two previous Delivery Group meetings.
- 1.3 With two Delivery Group meetings having now taken place, discussions with individual Members and contact from interested parties, we are now beginning to see early indications that further engagement will be needed before decisions can be made on the best uses for the site and the resulting work then needed to deliver such a scheme. This work has the potential to be really positive but also resource hungry.
- 1.4 In looking at how to resource these wider place prosperity projects and Queen's Drive the Service Lead has concluded that additional resource is needed. The question however is whether to secure additional resourcing for the other place prosperity projects or for the Queen's Drive project. There are pro's and con's to each approach but on balance based on the Officers roles now in those other projects which will not be easy to handover, but also a sense that a fresh resource to deliver Queen's Drive, with new ideas, would be most beneficial. The timing of this and its impact on Queen's Drive also fits more comfortably, with other projects needing to maintain momentum over the coming months but with a pause on Queen's Drive giving time to take stock of the current position.
- 1.5 This conclusion and therefore recommendation is no reflection whatsoever on the two Officers concerned and the Service Lead's thoughts on the project so far were made clear at the first Delivery Group meeting which took place in October 2020. The project has delivered on key milestones for the benefit of Exmouth, including the road alignment, new car park, Sideshore and very popular temporary uses but the phase 3 site is proving challenging to obtain consensus from Members and the public on how to move this forward. Whilst past decisions might have proven unpopular over time, as Officers the role was to take forward the activities agreed by Cabinet or Council and this is what has been done.
- 1.6 Considering the resourcing of Queen's Drive we've also needed to be mindful of wider opportunities in Exmouth and to consider this in the context of the covid pandemic and supporting the District in terms of economic recovery through direct interventions, in the context of this report in respect of direct interventions using existing assets which have a catalytic place making and growth / prosperity impact. The potential opportunities in Exmouth are greater than many other areas because of the comparatively larger Council

asset base. A pipeline of projects is being identified through the Team Devon Economic Recovery work and Devon Prospectus which this Service is working together on with the Growth Development & Prosperity Service and this includes potential projects in Exmouth, Queen's Drive being one. Arguably there has never been a better / more pressing time to take forward opportunities that fit neatly within the Places theme of the Devon Prospectus particularly around workspace offer (programme 11), establishing the town as a demonstrator for natural capital (programme 13) and in the area of tourism (programme 14) and Queen's Drive but also other projects within Exmouth where the Council already hold assets, fits neatly with this.

- 1.7 The beginning of 2021 has heralded two key economic development challenges – supporting recovery from the pandemic and adapting to life outside of the European Union. The November 2020 national Spending Review included a commitment to launch a £4bn Levelling Up Fund that will invest in local infrastructure and which will support economic recovery. The Spending Review also includes an initial £220m of investment in 2021/22 to help local areas prepare for the introduction of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This is the successor to European structural funds.
- 1.8 It is clearly important that we maximise our chances of successfully accessing these funds. This is a concern shared by the Local Enterprise Partnership who have asked the County Council to help prepare a prioritised pipeline of projects, the pipeline referenced earlier in this report. It can be seen that this covers a wide variety of themes from transport and town centres to carbon reduction and culture. Work is underway to populate this template in anticipation of there being a report being taken to the LEP Board meeting in April. Projects will need to continue to be moved forward to an investment ready condition so as to maximise the chances of successfully accessing the funding streams. In turn this will be a further important ingredient in supporting recovery and the LEP is itself moving forward with the publication of a 'Build Back Better' prospectus. A report on this will be coming to Cabinet in February from the Service Lead – Growth, Development & Prosperity. Exmouth being our largest town and with a range of EDDC assets in our ownership, opportunities will be more readily available to enable direct intervention and hence the proposal for a dedicated resource. Devon County Council in November 2020 produced a briefing on economic impacts of covid in East Devon and produced a vulnerability index. Whilst it is acknowledged that both Axminster (Central and West) and Honiton (Steamers Meadow and King Street) have both shown to have been more impacted, they are closely followed by Exmouth Town Centre, Exmouth Littleham, Exmouth Central, Exmouth The Point, Docks and Victoria Road and Exmouth Moorfield areas. 5 of the 10 most vulnerable neighbourhoods in East Devon are in Exmouth. This does not preclude projects in other locations across the District being taken forward and indeed those too are also included in the pipeline document. By providing this dedicated resource for Exmouth, we are creating capacity for the existing Place & Prosperity Team to focus on those other areas, something not possible without this resource.
- 1.9 To actively contribute to the Team Devon Economic Recovery work across the District in terms of the 'place' themes and using our assets we require staffing resource. We have two Officers, previously involved in Queen's Drive, along with support of the Estates Team within the Service who are this resource, but they cannot do both this and deliver Queen's Drive and hence the business case for additional resource. For the reasons outlined above in 1.4 it is considered wise when considering additional resource, to look at using this additional resource to focus on Queen's Drive and other Exmouth based place & prosperity projects, rather than the new resource focussing on other areas of the District where projects are already in-train. The outcome ultimately is the same from a cost perspective but provides a dedicated resource for Exmouth which can report in to the Queen's Drive

Delivery Group (or indeed whatever this group might become) and indeed any other Exmouth based forums. As has already been said, the asset base in Exmouth, whether it be Queen's Drive assets, car parks, Town Hall, depots and land provide for some really exciting interventions to be explored. Indeed whilst perhaps now historic, a range of exciting opportunities were identified from the Exmouth Town Centre and Seafront Masterplan which was published in 2012.

1.10 The proposal is to appoint:

- a) 1x Development Surveyor for a 2 year period.
- b) 1x Engagement / Project Officer for same 2 year period.

1.11 Funding would be through the Council's Business Rates Pilot Reserve to the sum of up to £200,000. This reserve was created from additional business rate income obtained when the Council was successful in a bid to Government (Devon Business Rate Pool) for a year trial of operating a 100% business rate retention scheme. The additional funds obtained were placed in a reserve with the purpose defined by Council as to encourage and protect the economy of the District. There remains at this stage an uncommitted balance on the Reserve of £1.584m. Further reports for member approval to utilise this reserve will come forward but sufficient funding is available to meet this request if supported by members.

1.12 These posts to report direct to Service Lead – Place, Assets & Commercialisation.

1.13 It is envisaged that the resource is to be focussed 50% of time on Queen's Drive (which will take priority) with the remainder of time available on other projects in Exmouth. If Queen's Drive requires additional resource exceeding this allowance, then less capacity will exist for other projects but through managing the Exmouth projects as a programme, the Service Lead and Portfolio Holder with the Queen's Drive Delivery Group can manage this split.

1.14 For the first 6 months of the appointments the Engagement / Project Officer will be engaged predominantly with Queen's Drive with the Development Surveyor focussing on a suite of other projects in Exmouth alongside Queen's Drive, determining viability and deliverability.

1.15 This proposal will require Cabinet approval and if approved the posts will then be recruited to. Until such time as the appointments are made during the summer of 2021, the Events Team will lead on temporary uses for the 2021 season (separate report to this Delivery Group of 25th January) under the direction of the Service Lead – Place, Assets & Commercialisation, but progress on the long term uses of Queen's Drive Phase 3 will be put on-hold.