

Report to AMF – 2nd December 2020

Place, Assets & Commercialisation Service Update

Place & Prosperity Team

The Team identifies and takes forward projects that invest in and make best use of the Council's land, property and infrastructure assets to optimise their value, the Council's revenues and improve service delivery, as well as contributing towards the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of our localities and communities. The Team's remit also includes wider Place Making initiatives working with 3rd party asset owners, securing funding and promoting best practice in Place Making and Regeneration.

Key projects being progressed over recent months include:

The Team has been managing this ERDF funded project and co-ordinating delivery of projects across different council services. Whilst there was initial engagement with all the towns and parishes, there was only a small response and interest from them to delivering projects directly. The delivery of the project is onerous with stringent funding and eligibility criteria. The project has therefore not been able to progress as originally envisaged but is now intended to be delivered through EDDC ourselves, managed through work streams led by different Services on eligible activities such as business advice, provision of safety measures (signage, hand sanitiser) and footfall studies. Any funding will need to be spent by 31 March 2021.

Working with Devon Wildlife Trust, tenant operator of Seaton Jurassic on their phase 2 proposals. Reported to cabinet on 28 October and approved for progression of the project to deliver additional outdoor interpretation space. A planning application for this, submitted by DWT is expected to go to Planning committee on 2 December. This relates to the Seaton Wetlands Link project which was reported to cabinet in January 2020. Other projects relating to this are being progressed by the team and Countryside Services.

Day to day management of the Business Centre, ensuring all risk assessments carried out appropriately so that the centre is covid compliant. Providing tenant guidance and ensuring reception service is maintained for deliveries. Working with colleagues in Estates and Property & FM Teams to deliver on the Business Centre transition project providing efficiencies for the running of the centre and improving the offer for tenants.

The Queen's Drive Delivery Group has reconvened and has held 2 meetings in public. The Group will decide on the future direction of the project in due course.

Commencing a review of some beach hut sites requiring investment. This is at very early stages and further information on this will be provided to a future AMF.

The council is in receipt of an allocation of £125,000 in funding from central government for a programme known as One Public Estate. The purpose of the fund is to identify opportunities to work in partnership with other public sector providers

within the District, release surplus public sector land for housing development and unlock financial savings through more efficient use of assets. It is intended to provide revenue funding to carry out initial option appraisals and feasibility studies, rather than be for any capital spend on delivery. Initially the focus was intended to be on Exmouth and Axminster but more recently the Funding Administrators have requested that there be a more district wide focus to ensure spend is eligible for the funding. Further information will be provided to a future AMF but work on this has been progressing over recent months.

Estates Team

While the new challenges presented by a global pandemic have introduced new challenges, the day to day management of the portfolio continues and the team are currently dealing with a significant volume of rent reviews, lease renewals and other lease related matters in respect of properties currently leased out.

The efforts to avoid significant voids in the portfolio remain ongoing and as part of this the team are currently dealing with the marketing of Warren View in Exmouth which so far has involved a marketing excise to produce expressions of interest which will be considered by a member panel shortly.

The team are also currently busy with the annual insurance valuations. This work involves providing insurance valuations for all of the Council's properties so that these can be provided to the Council's insurers as part of the policy renewal. This is an important area of work as it not only ensures that we are adequately insured should the worst happen but accurate valuations avoid the risk of being over insured and paying more for premiums than we may need to. Once the insurance work is completed the team focus will be on Asset Valuations which will see the revaluations of around £70m of the Council's Land & Building assets for inclusion as part of the Council's statement of accounts. This is a significant piece of work which is vitally important from a financial perspective and needs to be delivered on time to avoid any delays in publication of the accounts.

Work on behalf of Housing continues apace with the team working on provision of valuations for sales of properties under the "Right to Buy" scheme and also acquiring new properties to be added to the existing housing stock. At present the team are working on a number of negotiations which will see a range of accommodation types added to the stock which it is hoped will help to meet some of the most urgent needs.

Another area the team are currently working on is securing land for the provision of SANGS which will help to enable planning policies to be delivered effectively. The team are involved from a land assembly perspective which involves a significant amount of valuation and negotiation work to reach agreement for the acquisition or lease of areas of land.

We have also recently seen a significant increase in requests for wayleaves and easements in respect of Council owned land. Much of this is related to Jurassic Fibre's roll out of their network and the team are working with them to agree suitable sites and agreements for their equipment.

Property & Facilities Management Team

The Covid 19 pandemic has provided fresh and unique challenges for the Property and Facility Management Team. This has included the precautionary measures taken in Blackdown House, Exmouth Town Hall and other similar properties encompassing restrictions of access to desks and other social distancing measures, specialist signage, provision of hand sanitiser equipment and supplies and other associated items.

During the period since the start of the first lockdown in March, reactive maintenance has needed to continue to our properties and this too has required Covid precautionary measures to be undertaken. Of particular note has been the need for the Maintenance Technicians to ensure compliance with social distancing requirements which has impacted on the way works are arranged and carried out.

Aside from the more routine reactive maintenance work undertaken, there have been two arson attacks in Exmouth which occurred in July. At the Exmouth Pavilion there was fire damage to the Back of House areas following the setting alight of a dumpy bin against the wall of the building. Restoration works to this property are close to being completed, although there has been some programme frustration because of Covid considerations. At the Bumble & Bee Café a similar arson attack took place, with the extent of the damage being more significant than for the Pavilion. The Loss Adjuster has now confirmed his acceptance of the costs from the preferred contractor, and restoration works are now about to commence.

While Planned Maintenance and Capital Works have by necessity taken a lesser priority during the period, there have been several particular projects that are either underway or being designed including the provision of new modular changing buildings at Seaton Town Football Club, while at Exmouth Leisure Centre consultants have been appointed to design new improved energy efficient lighting and investigate the removal of the very large cold water storage tank, with the supply being altered to direct feed.

A Cabinet Report has been presented regarding the investment works at Honiton Swimming Pool. The previous approved budget for this work was proven to be inadequate following a further investigation into the issues with the floor screeds and water ingress both externally and internally. Cabinet accepted the report recommendations on 28 October, with Council further considering the matter on 9 December. If approved, the works will be tendered shortly thereafter and potentially commence during Q1 2021.

Reactive maintenance in the period has included work to beach huts, sports and leisure centres, public conveniences, esplanade shelters and other properties. This has included the updating of the toilets in the clubhouse at Warren View to ensure Covid compliance and availability for safe use by those attending football games.

One significant aspect undertaken by the Team, primarily the Area Building Surveyors, has been compliance, with numerous reports and surveys being undertaken at council properties for such matters as asbestos, fire risk assessments, legionella, boilers and heating, life safe systems, PAT testing, lightning protection, fire extinguishers etc. Reports are carefully considered and where applicable remedial actions are being identified with the associated recommended works being organised. Relevant documents are being uploaded onto Idox and Uniform. The Team has also been assisting and liaising with SWAP while they undertake their compliance audit for the department.

Property stock condition data is being currently reviewed and updated, including the inclusion of potential high level costings for associated investment over the next 30 years. Net present values are being established.

Procurement will commence shortly for maintenance works due to commence from April 2021 following the conclusion of the current agreement at the end of March.

Tim Child
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