

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Planning Committee held at Online via the zoom app on 22 October 2020

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 5.03 pm

77 Public speaking

Councillor Barry Rogers of Cranbrook Town Council spoke about weighing up the two propositions; delivery now with a known end delivery date, or the alternative that had no clear timescale. He advised the committee that the local residents wanted delivery now, which would allow residents to have facilities close enough to walk to, embracing the ethos of active lives in the town. He stated that there was no appetite for a hotel, and business units were available at the nearby Skypark, therefore not required in the town. He felt that leisure centres were unviable. He was not confident that the District Council could deliver and urged the committee to support the proposal from the East Devon New Community Partners (EDNCp).

Councillor Ray Bloxham, Devon County Councillor and Member of Cranbrook Strategic Delivery Board spoke about recent positive discussion between the County Council and the EDNCp that delivered additional funding to the design work; and how not moving forward now jeopardised local projects to deliver youth services. He reminded the committee of how the fabric of high streets had changed dramatically in recent years, and they had to be mindful of the local economy and the close proximity by train to Exeter's offer. He made reference to a county report comparing the two options and asked that, to move forward, the proposals of the EDNCp would boost the town. Not accepting the proposals would be detrimental to the morale of the residents.

Mr Peter Healey, a resident of Cranbrook, had submitted a statement read out on his behalf by the Democratic Services Officer, which stated:

"I strongly urge councillors and planners to take the longer-term view when deciding between the two options for the development of Cranbrook Town Centre.

To my mind, the polls undertaken by Cranbrook Town Council (CTC) and the East Devon New Community Partners (EDNCp) are invalid, because...

1. The polls were taken before people have had a chance to see any details of the proposed Cranbrook Town Centre master plan SPD, and before the EDNCp plan was finalised. Indeed, the Cranbrook Town Centre report has only just been made publicly available.
2. The wording of the CTC poll was heavily biased towards supporting the short-term EDNCp view. It was suggested that the alternative might be no town centre, or supermarket, for many years.
3. We were led to believe that Morrison's would pull out if the EDNCp proposal was not accepted, whereas it now appears that it is the EDNCp who would cause this to happen (see sections 13.2 and 15.2 of the Cranbrook Town Centre report).
4. The polls were on-line and therefore open to abuse.

There appears to be an unhealthy rush, by some, to get the EDNCp proposal accepted before it can be properly scrutinised and before the alternative proposals by EDDC are heard. The outcome of the Cranbrook DPD examination process could also have important bearing (see section 8.4).

The EDNCp proposal is short-term, profit driven, and significantly reduces the options for future development of the town. The EDNCp's track record shows that they cannot be trusted to deliver on their obligations (see sections 5 and 6), so why trust them now?

I find the following quote from section 13.2 incredible! – alluding to coercion...

“They would like the Council to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to agree in principle to their proposals. Without the MOU in place they assert that they will not conclude the negotiated sale with HDD (to deliver a supermarket, high street retail and nursery) and will not complete sufficient dwellings in the wider town development to trigger the need for some of the S106 obligations for the town centre.”

Lythan Nevard, Cranbrook resident and Minister for Cranbrook spoke about the strong sense of community that town had. She referenced this decision as a tipping point, outlining the needs of the area including community space to cater to the growing community. She felt that the social infrastructure could not currently keep pace with the growing community, including practical issues such as storage space for community groups. The message of the town centre “coming soon” had been in place for seven years, and as a result the residents had become disillusioned, and some would be likely to leave the town as a result. She stressed that the community needed delivery soon to become a town, not a housing estate.

Andy Richardson, a resident of Cranbrook, had submitted a statement read out on his behalf by the Democratic Services Officer, which stated:

“I have lived in Cranbrook since 2015, one of the things that drew us here to live was the idea of a new town and a new start. Since I have lived here, I have seen many changes to the landscape and what goes on. One thing I was told when buying my house, was about how the town centre was going to be built and offer us shopping, eating etc. We are now in 2020 and in the middle of a pandemic! Still no town centre is evident. As a resident of Cranbrook it is not great to know that promises are not being delivered. I'm in favour of something being done now, not on the never never. Is it wrong to actually want what has been promised by various committees and panels of so called experts. We desperately need facilities in this town, or we are in danger of becoming a suburb of Exeter and nothing more than a big housing estate! It's time for EDDC and the consortium to deliver on facilities for us. For too long this has dragged on, and I doubt a trade town centre would work. Though it seems to us as residents that nobody cares about what's going on. High council tax rates, extras put onto what we pay for, and still nothing from the consortium or EDDC. You need to deliver our facilities, facilities that have been promised. At present nobody has any faith in any of the decision makers. In fact many people think those in command are trying to get out of what they have promised to do, and see Cranbrook solely as a money making exercise for the developers. This attitude that seems to persist in delivering the facilities on a "not now, when we decide to do it" has to stop. We the residents of Cranbrook want our town centre and facilities. You need to sit down and work out how to deliver on the promises made, and stop shying away from what needs to be done. If this path carried on Cranbrook will be just a concrete jungle with little going for it! And whose hare-brained idea is it for a hotel? We got nothing to offer a hotel company, we still don't have a supermarket for crying out loud. Some of us think the consortium and developers are only interested in profits and not the people.”

East Devon New Community Partners presentation

East Devon New Community Partners – represented by Nick Duckworth, Scott Davidson and Nick Freer – gave a presentation to the committee outlining their proposals. This covered an update since the publication of the agenda, including:

- Amended composite layout for the Town Centre;
- examples of elevational treatments to give a distinctive aesthetic to the town;
- amend the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to ensure that heating will not be delivered in the town centre by mains gas sources, but look for a viable district heating solution;
- Diverting s106 contributions from the Bowling Green Allotments and Formal Play to the Town Council building;
- Reminder of the results of the consultation undertaken by EDNCp.

The EDNCp representatives also outlined their proposals to the committee, and presented slides showing the site layout around the food store, a visual impression of what the street view would look like.

The representatives were keen to stress that the alternative approach by means of a Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) will lead to delay of delivery and will not lead to partnership. They did not consider the SPD route as meeting the community vision for the town centre, and was unnecessary, as the land made available through the proposed MoU (with the inclusion of additional 0.4 hectares of land on TC4d) was capable of delivering:

- Extra care, Health and Wellbeing Centre, Town Hall and other office or residential uses on TC2;
- All Devon County Council requirements on TC4b; and
- Any remaining section 106 uses on TC4c

The explained the considerable difference a delivery of a food store would make to local residents, providing them means of a full weekly shop. The food store would also serve as a catalyst to a sustainable town centre. The outline of product range was explained, along with the scale of job creation of approximately 60 FTE at the food store. Concern was voiced that the operator would go elsewhere if it could not be demonstrated that the food store could be delivered. The EDNCp were ready to submit a planning application in the New Year, looking to delivery by the summer of 2022 to local residents.

The representatives of the EDNCp reiterated the support of the County Council, Cranbrook Town Council, and local residents in their proposals. The stated that their proposals were not supported out of frustration, but because they delivered what the Town required.

78 **Declarations of interest**

Councillor Kevin Blakey – personal interest – Member of Cranbrook Town Council; Chairman of the Cranbrook Strategic Delivery Board; and has attended multiple meetings with developers and others since 2015.

Councillor Sarah Chamberlain – personal interest – owns a smallholding at Broadclyst Station on the edge of Cranbrook.

Councillor Paul Hayward – personal interest – daughter resides in Cranbrook.

Councillor Mike Howe – personal interest – owner of retail village store in Clyst St Mary and previous director of a retail outlet.

Councillor Dan Ledger – personal interest – Member of Cranbrook Strategic Delivery Board.

Councillor Eleanor Rylance – personal interest – representing parish of Broadclyst and former Ward Member for Cranbrook.

Councillor Kay Bloxham – personal interest - Member of Cranbrook Town Council; Member of the Cranbrook Strategic Delivery Board; and has attended multiple meetings with developers and others.

Councillor Sam Hawkins - personal interest - Member of Cranbrook Town Council; Member of the Cranbrook Strategic Delivery Board; and has attended multiple meetings with developers and others.

79 **Matters of urgency**

There were no matters of urgency.

80 **Confidential/exempt item(s)**

There were no items under this designation.

81 **Cranbrook Town Centre**

The committee had before them a report outlining the background to Cranbrook Town Centre, and two options for its delivery:

- A commercially led approach, presented by the East Devon New Community Partners (EDNCp);
- A Cranbrook Town Centre Masterplan SPD that seeks to reflect the original vision for the town centre.

The Service Lead for Planning Strategy and Development Management outlined some key elements of his extensive report, and asked the committee to consider the following questions in their consideration of the offer from the EDNCp:

- Does it deliver a town centre to the requirements that have been agreed by the Council?
- If not, are there sufficient grounds to depart from policy?
- What if any harm would arise from the EDNCp offer?
- Are the Supplementary Planning Document proposals significantly better and are they achievable?

He outlined the recommendations in the report, which permitted a twin track approach of both starting to develop an SPD whilst being open to continued negotiations with the EDNCp.

Questions and comments by members outside of the committee

Cranbrook ward member Councillor Kim Bloxham strongly expressed the need of the residents, made clear through consultation, to deliver the facilities long awaited. She reminded the committee of the protracted negotiations over several years, still with no resolution to a positive way forward and the delivery of a town centre and its facilities. She stressed that local residents were totally disillusioned with the approach of the District Council and felt that they were not part of East Devon. She accepted that the

EDNCp proposals were not perfect, but she supported local residents in wanting their option to be agreed, and urged the committee to reject the SPD proposal.

Cranbrook ward member Councillor Sam Hawkins challenged the statement in the report that the Council has the ability to invest in the delivery of Cranbrook. He felt that there had been no willingness to invest, with one example being the country park being funded by the local community. He too referenced the local opinion being that Cranbrook did not feel that it was part of East Devon only the cash cow of the district. Exeter have nearly completed a new leisure centre accessible by residents by train in 9 minutes, so one is not needed in the centre of town; the SANGS requirements for the district has been covered by Cranbrook's s106 provision. He felt that the timescale of the SPD was unrealistic, based on previous experience. There was little commercial benefit for any retailers to come to Cranbrook when so much is available at Exeter. Any delay in delivering a town centre now only wastes the benefit of the Enterprise Zone designation and the retention of business rates possible until 2022. He likened the issue to the West Lothian question.

Other key points made by members outside of the committee included:

- Improving building standards;
- Care with gaining assurances relating to the District heat network;
- Leisure facilities key for the town's youthful community.

The Chairman then heard extensive debate from the Committee Members, including Cranbrook Ward Member Councillor Kevin Blakey, with highlights detailed below.

For and against the EDNCp proposals

- Provided a swifter solution to the needs of the town;
- Residents clearly in desperate need of a solution now;
- Devon County Council in support – to clarify, the Service Lead for Planning Strategy and Development Management outlined that any Devon County Council agreement still needed to be ratified by their Cabinet;
- Apology to the people of Cranbrook that this had not been delivered to date, but the proposal contained too many houses, and diverting money to put towards the town council building and design meant still equated to the money having to be found for those needs to still be funded;
- Viability not proved with the proposals, and there is still a need for a hotel and employment space;
- Not enough in terms of outside space and facilities contained in the proposals
- The proposed town council building was to be a functional commercial building that could raise income from hire fees;
- Several shops were included in the design, and other shops could be located elsewhere in the town;
- Experience of MoU elsewhere was expressed, as the document was not binding, and prone to frequent renegotiation;
- Design elements shown were not attractive enough, and should be a flagship for the town with creative and inspiring design.

For and against the Cranbrook Town Centre Masterplan SPD proposal

- Committing to an SPD was no guarantee of delivery;

- Since the original vision for the town, circumstances had drastically changed and the mix of retail, social and other facilities in this vision needed to be amended to reflect current times and pressures;
- Preferred route to deliver the needs of the town in the long term, particularly to serve the town at the size it will reach;
- Many examples elsewhere in the country where the town centre development had been incorrect and not fit for purpose – learn from those and invest the time and effort to deliver a centre that was what the residents deserved;
- Challenging evidence that a leisure centre is required in the town centre, particularly reflected in evidence in other towns, where leisure centres were located on the outskirts, providing parking. In response, the Service Lead explained that taking the EDNCp proposal left few options to accommodate leisure elsewhere in the town; and that accommodating such facilities centrally allowed those to link with other central services and be within easy walking distance for its customers;
- Where would any public toilets be located, as there was no major central building to locate them to – were the Council prepared to build and maintain them.

It was proposed by Councillor Blakey, seconded by Councillor Moulding (and subsequently by Councillor Allen when Councillor Moulding left the meeting) that:

- a) All three tiers of local government and ward members work proactively with the Consortium's proposal to refine the offer;
- b) That all parties work together to finalise a Memorandum of Understanding which provides clarity on delivery and related timescales for the Consortium's offer and provides a basis for the town centre in Cranbrook to be delivered as soon as possible for the benefit of the community.

The above motion failed on a recorded vote as follows:

Councillor Allen	For
Councillor Arnott	Against
Councillor Blakey	For
Councillor Chamberlain	Against
Councillor Davey	Against
Councillor Hayward	Against
Councillor Hookway	Against
Councillor Howe	For
Councillor Ledger	Abstain
Councillor McLauchlan	Against
Councillor Rylance	Against
Councillor Thomas	For

The recommendations set out in the report were proposed by Councillor Davey, seconded by Councillor Chamberlain.

RESOLVED

1. That the background to Cranbrook Town Centre, the planning obligation requirements on the developers, and the current planning policy position have been considered;
2. That the proposals made by the East Devon New Communities Partners and the officer's concept for a proposed Town Centre Masterplan have been considered;

3. Advise the East Devon New Communities Partners that the Council is not minded to enter into the proposed Memorandum of Understanding based on the proposed heads of terms at the present time, but is open to further negotiation;
4. That work continues on the draft SPD Masterplan. In the event that sufficient funding commitments are made, a draft SPD and delivery plan be presented to the Strategic Planning Committee in December 2020. In the event that sufficient funding cannot be identified, a further report be brought to the Strategic Planning Committee in December 2020 to update Members and give consideration to the East Devon New Communities Partners proposals as they stand at that time;
5. That a further report be brought to the Strategic Planning Committee to consider alternative development delivery vehicles.

RECOMMENDATION to Cabinet

That funding be made available to support the pro-active delivery of the town centre, based on the draft SPD Masterplan.

The above resolutions and recommendation were carried on a recorded vote as follows:

Councillor Allen	Abstain
Councillor Arnott	For
Councillor Blakey	Against
Councillor Chamberlain	For
Councillor Davey	For
Councillor Hayward	For
Councillor Hookway	For
Councillor Howe	Against
Councillor Ledger	Abstain
Councillor McLauchlan	For
Councillor Rylance	For
Councillor Thomas	Against

(Committee members Councillors Moulding and Skinner left the meeting before voting took place, having given notice to the Chair at the start of the meeting of their need to leave at 4.00pm)

Attendance List

Councillors present:

P Arnott
M Allen
K Blakey
S Chamberlain
O Davey (Vice-Chairman)
P Hayward
N Hookway
M Howe
D Ledger (Chairman)
K McLauchlan
A Moulding
E Rylance
P Skinner
I Thomas

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

M Armstrong
D Bickley
K Bloxham
B De Saram
P Faithfull
S Hawkins
S Jackson
J Loudoun
M Rixson
J Rowland
E Wragg

Officers in attendance:

Ed Freeman, Service Lead Planning Strategy and Development Management
Shirley Shaw, Planning Barrister
Mark Williams, Chief Executive
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (and Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Wendy Harris, Democratic Services Officer
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer
Thea Billeter, Cranbrook New Community Manager

Chairman

Date: