

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Exmouth Queen's Drive Delivery Group held at Online via the Zoom app on 17 February 2022

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 11.00 am and ended at 12.40 pm

20 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

21 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 30 November 2021

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 30 November 2021 were noted as a true and accurate record.

22 Declarations of interest

Cllr N Hookway: Minutes 23 – 24; Personal Interest: Former Chair of the Save Exmouth Seafront group.

Cllr C Wright: Minutes 23 – 24; Personal Interest: Former tenant of the Queen's Drive event space.

Cllr A Bailey: Minutes 23 – 24; Personal Interest: Member of Exmouth Town Council

Cllr B De Saram: Minutes 23 – 24; Personal Interest: Member of Exmouth Town Council

Cllr O Davey: Minutes 23 – 24; Personal Interest: Member of Exmouth Town Council

Cllr S Gazzard: Minutes 23 – 24; Personal Interest: Member of Exmouth Town Council

23 Temporary Uses Update

The Service Lead Place, Assets and Commercialisation presented his report, providing a general update on progress ready for the new season to commence on 1 April 2022.

The report included the following points:

- The temporary planning consent for the existing temporary uses at Queen's Drive Space expires on 31 March 2022. On the recommendation of the Delivery Group and following a consultative meeting of Cabinet on 6 October 2021 and subsequent Senior Officer Decision, an application was submitted in January 2022 for permanent planning consent. This application will be determined in March 2022.
- The report outlined the investment works being commissioned to be undertaken during February/March 2022 utilising an otherwise underspend in the European Regional Development Fund Welcome Back Fund (ERDF WBF).
- A bike rack and new gates are also being explored to determine whether deliverability is possible within the timeframe required to utilise the ERDF WBF.
- The Event Space, Fitness Area and the Big Wheel (proposed for Beach Gardens) have been marketed and expressions of interest will be assessed using a scoring matrix. Once operators have been selected, the Portfolio Holder and the Delivery Group Chair will be informed. It has been made clear to interested parties for the Big Wheel that planning consent will be required.
- Marketing of the Trading Area and Bar has been delayed. It was recognised that this was frustrating for traders but due to lack of in-house resource, the work had had to be outsourced. The consultant would make contact and seek to agree a commercial rent with each trader, and bar operator from last year, by the end of February, and we would market one vacant/additional pitch at the same time. Should any previous operators not wish to at the new rental level, those pitches would be marketed in March.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- It was clarified that the former car park is not included in the planning application for the Queen's Drive Space as it is the subject of planning consent granted last year for a period of 2 or 3 years, therefore is not due for renewal at this stage.
- The cost for the investment works for this season is in the region of £20-30k. The budget for this is already in place following a change request related to the ERDF WBF, which has been approved.
- A Member asked if the new benches being procured as part of the investment works were future-proofed, to ensure best value for money. The Service Lead Place, Assets and Commercialisation remarked that timber benches were being replaced with recycled composite material type benches which by their nature would be expected to last much longer.
- In respect to the events space that had received expressions of interest, it was confirmed that the offers aligned with the vision of wanting something a little different, more variety, and sustainability.
- A Member asked if there was a contingency in place if it was not possible to procure the gates and bike racks in time to utilise the available ERDF WBF funding. The Service Lead Place, Assets and Commercialisation responded that once the costs are known, if the ERDF WBF was not suitable, he could liaise with the Strategic Lead Finance to ascertain whether other existing budgets are in place which could be used.
- Responding to a question about the length of the lease for the fitness space, the Service Lead Place, Assets and Commercialisation stated that a 2 year lease might attract more interest but the current offer is for a 1 year lease. He commented that since these are temporary uses, it is important that they do not conflict with any longer term plans for the site but 2 years is a term officers could consider.
- In response to a Member's question about discussions with other authorities that had seafront regeneration schemes, the Service Lead Place, Assets and Commercialisation stated that conversations had not taken place over the past 12-15 months as the focus had been on temporary uses. Prior to that, there had been extensive discussions with a range of authorities and consultants, and talks with other councils would resume once there was some clarity on the direction of travel for permanent uses.
- It was noted that the site for a Big Wheel is a prime seafront location and a Member asked whether there was a back-up plan for an alternative attraction in the event that an operator for the Big Wheel did not come forward. The Service Lead Place, Assets and Commercialisation responded that the Big Wheel is a concept generally accepted as a good use of that site but if this is not possible, they would explore with Streetscene potential other uses for the site, depending on planning consents.
- A Member sought to understand how the team arrived at the fees for the sites, and what benchmarking had been done. The Service Lead Place, Assets and Commercialisation responded that a formal market valuation report had been produced by Torbay Development Agency. This was a confidential document detailing comparable evidence within Exmouth and elsewhere, including strong evidence from Queen's Drive itself. He added that the Council is under a duty to get best consideration and it is important to ensure fairness and consistency across the site and more widely across the district.
- Concern was expressed about the impact on marketability of the height restrictions for fairground equipment on the events space. The Service Lead Place, Assets and Commercialisation responded that the height restriction was part of the planning conditions but there had nevertheless been good interest in the site.
- In response to Member's question, the Service Lead Place, Assets and Commercialisation commented that it was not known whether all traders would be signed up by 31st March, enabling them to operate for Easter, because only individual traders know how profitable the site is to their business and whether the worth to them of the pitch equals the market value of that pitch. He added that no deals were done until leases were formally in place so whilst some positive response had already been received, leases still need to be progressed.

- In view of traders' feedback from last year, the team were exploring extensions to opening times and opportunities for small events to be held on the front space, to benefit all traders.
- A Member observed that the play park is very well used by young children and expressed the view that it should be expanded to increase capacity and include equipment for older children. The Service Lead Place, Assets and Commercialisation recognised that retention and enhancement of the play park needed to be considered when looking at longer term uses for the site.

24 **Introduction to new Project Manager - Place & Prosperity (Exmouth)**

The Service Lead Place, Assets & Commercialisation was pleased to introduce and welcome Gerry Mills as the new Project Manager for Place & Prosperity (Exmouth). Introduction to Gerry and the Project Manager role included the following:

- Gerry's background is in economic development and place-making, with a delivery focus, comprising quite a unique skill set.
- The Project Manager role is about the long-term use of the various sites across Exmouth, how they contribute towards place-making and economy more generally, and what they give back. It was stressed that the Project Manager role is not about buildings and development alone.
- The role is one of two posts; the more junior post has not been filled and the funding for that post will likely be used to bring in additional support, when needed.
- Priorities for the next 6-9 months include consultation and engagement to generate ideas, linking with other pieces of work across the council such as the Cultural Strategy, Tourism Strategy and work around economic development and growth, and pulling together business cases. This will result in a report to the Delivery Group on a suite of delivery options, and then necessary recommendations through to Cabinet.

The new Project Manager for Place and Prosperity (Exmouth) delivered a presentation detailing his background including previous roles and the programmes he has managed, before inviting questions.

Comment and questions included:

- Members welcomed Gerry, offered thanks for the introduction, and comment was made on his strong background and its relevance to the Project Manager role, and his excellent credentials.
- A Member asked how the new Project Manager had gone about changing perceptions of an area, and how he would go about changing perceptions of Exmouth. The Project Manager Place & Prosperity (Exmouth) responded that changing perceptions is challenging, and difficult to quantify. It is important to assess the baseline by working with traders and the community to identify the current position and why a masterplan is needed to move development forward, and then reassess views at a later point in time to compare and contrast and recognise changes of perception. He added that consultation is crucial to success, ensuring that people have a sense that their input is valued and built into the masterplan.
- Responding to a Member's question about the Project Manager's knowledge of people's concerns about the Queen's Drive development, and issues that had gone before, the Project Manager stated that he had familiarised himself with the Delivery Group's previous public meetings. He observed that people were keen to see things moving forward and he would be driven by the Delivery Group on what the concept is and what the designs will look like.
- A Member commented that there are some negative connotations associated with a masterplan; there is a feeling that they do not always reflect what people want and often do not deliver results. The Project Manager responded that a masterplan sets out the longer term vision in order to avoid a piecemeal badly designed structure. Appropriate

and proportionate consultation is important, with a view to getting a unified consensus on the vision for the Queen's Drive space. He added that a masterplan is a 10 year plus programme, so immediate results will not be evident, but it is important to do what can be done.

- The Project Manager considered various mechanisms for consultation, in response to a Member's concerns about response rates and the limitations of in-person consultation events.
- A Member noted that the Project Manager had worked to connect the town and seafront in Stranraer in his previous role, and asked how this was done and whether lessons were learned that might be applicable in Exmouth. The Member noted that a one-way system had been implemented; he outlined how he felt a similar system might benefit Exmouth, but expressed that people might get upset about it and added that it would, in any case, require the support of Devon County Council. The Project Manager responded that changes had been made only following consultation and the key to connecting the town and waterfront had been i) successful engagement with traders and the local development group; ii) changing traffic priorities and how traffic flowed through the town; iii) architecturally opening up side streets leading to the waterfront to improve the view from the town to the waterfront; iv) closing off some of the side streets as part of the one-way system to reduce 'rat-runs' and make the streets more pedestrian-friendly; and v) lowering kerb heights and narrowing roads, which slowed traffic down, making the area safer for pedestrians and reducing accidents.

The Chair thanked the Project Manager for Place and Prosperity (Exmouth) for his contribution.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

P Arnott (Vice-Chair)
M Armstrong
O Davey
N Hookway (Chair)
A Colman
D Ledger
C Wright
S Gazzard
B De Saram
J Rowland
S Gazzard (Exmouth Town Council)
A Bailey (Exmouth Town Council)

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

G Jung
E Rylance
E Wragg

Officers in attendance:

Tim Child, Service Lead - Place, Assets & Commercialisation
Simon Davey, Strategic Lead Finance
Sarah James, Democratic Services Officer
Simon Kennedy, StreetScene Area Officer
Henry Gordon Lennox, Strategic Lead Governance and Licensing (and Monitoring Officer)
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer

Gerry Mills, Project Manager for Place and Prosperity (Exmouth)
Caitlin Davey, Streetscene Events Officer

Also in attendance:

Lisa Bowman, Town Clerk, Exmouth Town Council
Peter Gilpin, CEO, LED
Justin Moore, Ocean

Councillor apologies:

B Taylor

Chair:

Date: