

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Asset Management Forum held online via zoom on 19 June 2023

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.35 am and ended at 1.10 pm

1 Public speaking

There were no public speakers.

Councillor John Health advised the Forum that the parish of Beer was still keen to explore asset transfer; and he was pleased that a meeting will be taking place in Beer during July on the long running transfer project. He also wanted to recognise the extensive work by local parish councillor Tim Stephens in the project.

2 Notes from the previous meeting

The notes of the previous meeting held on 13 March 2023 were agreed.

3 Declarations of interest

Minute 7

Cllr Hayward; Affects Non Registerable Interest: Employed as Clerk at Axminster Town Council

Minute 8

Cllr Hall; Affects Non Registerable Interest: Member of Exmouth Town Council

Cllr Davey; Affects Non Registerable Interest: Member of Exmouth Town Council

Minute 10

Cllr Barlow; Affects Non Registerable Interest: Member of Sidmouth Town Council

Cllr Hartnell; Affects Non Registerable Interest: Member of Seaton Town Council, Devon County Council, and local business owner in Seaton

Cllr Faithfull; Affects Non Registerable Interest: Member of Ottery St Mary Town Council

Cllr Hayward; Affects Non Registerable Interest: Employed as Clerk at Axminster Town Council

4 Matters of urgency

None.

5 Confidential/exempt item(s)

None.

6 Estates Team Update

The Forum received an update from the Estates Team, highlighting:

- Continued improvement in reducing active cases;
- Increase in rental income as cases completed, and as a result of renewal of leases for some beach and seafront kiosk sites;

- Work on renegotiation of management agreements on some dual use leisure sites;
- Demand for workshops remains high;
- Continued assessment to identify opportunities of the disposal of poorly performing assets.

Work for the team in the coming months will include a review of the EPC rating for assets, with a view to identifying those that needed improvement and may generate a wider discussion around that asset's future. The team expected a change to the ratings to further tighten the energy efficiency requirements and were proactively planning for this change. The result of this work would be reported to a future meeting of the Forum.

In response to questions, the target set for the previous year of an increase of 3.25% in rental income had been achieved. Changes in rent income levels occurred either when the tenancy changed, or at regular rent reviews. Sites that were vacant were small in number and typically related to works to develop or change the site. Voids between re-lets were short.

Dual use site management agreements were under negotiation in line with the recently agreed Leisure Strategy. The Forum were advised that many of the existing agreements were no longer fit for purpose in that they did not reflect the current usage. Discussion had to take place with other leaseholders (such as Devon County Council) and the school to reach a consensus on a revised agreement.

RESOLVED that the Forum noted the report.

7 **Place and Prosperity Framework**

The Forum has previously reviewed the existing Commercial Investment Framework to assess its fit alongside the aspirations of Members in supporting economic recovery after the pandemic.

The resulting draft framework, now named the Place and Prosperity Framework has now been prepared. This aligns to the Council Plan 2021-2023 and addresses the opportunity to have a single fund of approximately £20M investing as a first tranche borrowed from the Public Works Loan Board.

The fund would be used to invest in three broad categories which benefit the district as a whole:

- Service delivery
- Economic regeneration
- Preventative action

The draft Framework also included the draft scoring matrix.

Any investment opportunity that achieves the necessary score and indicative return would then be progressed to a dedicated group of officers, termed the Investment Assessment Group, which would comprise of:

- Director – Finance
- Director – Governance and Licensing
- Assistant Director – Place, Assets and Commercialisation
- Other relevant officers on a case by case basis.

Any Full Appraisal arising from this Group would go forward to an Investment Board with delegated power to agree funding up to £5M (£5M or more requires approval from Council) which is suggested should comprise of:

- Director – Finance
- Leader
- Portfolio Holder for Finance and Assets

That Board would need to agree unanimously on the project, following consultation with relevant Ward Members.

In discussing the Board makeup, the Forum agreed that it should also include the Portfolio Holder for Economy; as well as include consultation with other relevant Portfolio Holders as well as relevant Ward members.

The Forum also discussed the need to have in place the agility to act quickly on investment opportunities, which this framework would provide. Seeking approval through Council for investment opportunities below £5M could prove difficult to achieve in a short timescale, and therefore opportunities would be lost, as had happened in the past.

RESOLVED

1. that the Place and Prosperity Framework be updated to include the Portfolio Holder for Economy on the Investment Board, make more explicit that it includes consultation with relevant Portfolio Holders at the Full Appraisal stage but also with other Portfolio Holders as deemed necessary;
2. refer the amended Place and Prosperity Framework to the Overview Committee for consideration, and for the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Assets to make any subsequent amendments from that consideration before referring to Cabinet with onward recommendation to Council for adoption.

8 Progress Update on Placemaking in Exmouth Town and Seafront

The Forum received an update on Placemaking in Exmouth Town and Seafront, which covered a number of elements including the Placemaking Plan, and the Destination Exmouth project.

In addition to the report, the Forum were informed that WSP had now been appointed to take forward the placemaking plan. WSP were also part of the design team for the Destination Exmouth Gateway project so should therefore deliver synergies.

Debate and response to questions included:

- The bookings for the events space at Queen's Drive were single day events;
- The Destination Exmouth project was still at an early stage but would be developed within the funding awarded; an update would be sought from Devon County Council on the DfT payments. Members offered their support to put pressure on the DfT to release the payments;
- Commenting on the car park signage improvements, emphasis was made on both quality and appropriate nature of signage for all the Council's assets.

The Forum were advised that training for members in placemaking, delivered by external facilitators, would take place in September. This was intended to cover Cabinet, Asset Management Forum, and Placemaking in Exmouth Town and Seafront Group members in addition to other members who choose to attend this in-person training.

RESOLVED that the Forum noted the report.

9 **Place & Prosperity Team Update**

The Forum received an update on the following projects:

Seaton Jurassic

Negotiations continued but progress was being made

Public Toilets at Esplanade & Drill Hall, Sidmouth

Heads of terms were close to completion. Once done, the next stage would be for Rockfish to submit their planning application for the site.

Debate on this issue included:

- Welcomed development to improve that area of the town, which would provide excellent amenity value and help boost the economy of the town;
- Seeking assurance that adequate toilet provision was in place, as the current provision of approximately ten facilities would reduce to two under the Rockfish development. In response, the Forum were reminded of the changing places facility near the pool and advised that the terms for Rockfish included a financial incentive to ensure the toilet provision in that development was open for the summer season of 2024;
- The Portfolio Holder for Coast, Country and Environment would go back to Sidmouth Town Council to clarify their stance on the toilet provision, as he had been informed that the town council was in full agreement with the plan for toilet provision in that area.

Axe Valley Levelling UP funding bid

Work undertaken for the bid, which was unsuccessful, was still useful to help identify the validity of smaller projects that could be delivered. This included three employment sites for review of viability; as well as re-activating the decision to market the Seaton Moridunum site – now under active marketing.

Discussion took place on the likelihood of a third round of bidding, and how that impacted on a bid if some of the projects listed in the second round were no longer part of that process. The concern was raised that it might be harder to demonstrate the economic benefits to the wider area on the basis of the remaining projects, such as Seaton seafront development, which may be too weak on its own merit to attract funding.

In response, the Forum discussed the balance between waiting for a third round, and being able to deliver some smaller projects through other means. Other projects may also come forward that could form part of a third bid or an alternative bid. To date, there was no clear confirmation of the submission date, or the criteria of a third round under the Levelling Up bid process, although a third round was expected at some point.

Seaton Moridunum

As stated earlier, the site was now under active marketing and some interest in the site had been received.

Devon Place Urban Renewal Project

Board meetings for Axminster and Seaton were scheduled for July.

Depots Review

The review was a collaborative effort with the Streetscene service, in light of the changing demand of the service and the service aspirations. The Portfolio Holder for Coast, Country and Environment informed the Forum of some aspects of the review, including the need to have charging points for electric fleet vehicles.

Community Asset transfer

The expression of interest from Ottery St Mary Town Council was now before the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Assets for a decision.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

10 **Property and FM Team Update Report**

The Forum received the detailed report on the planned preventative maintenance and compliance works undertaken between March and May 2023.

Works outside of the planned schedule were also detailed.

Reactive work on LED managed assets continued to be the largest proportion of the work at 42.22%.

In response to a question about the maintenance required at Blackdown House, the condition of the building was confirmed to be in good condition. The high level of maintenance requests related to the regular use of the building by staff, with many of the works undertaken by in-house staff.

In response to a question relating to a recent heating installation at Exmouth pool. This installation was undertaken by LED but information would be sought and provided to the councillor after the meeting; however the Forum were told about the work on all three pools sentry system on water circulation that had been successful in delivering energy savings for the pool running costs.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

P Hayward (Chair)
P Arnott
O Davey
M Hall

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

I Barlow
M Chapman
P Faithfull
M Hartnell
J Heath
G Jung
M Rixson

Officers in attendance:

Tim Child, Assistant Director Place, Assets & Commercialisation
Rob Harrison, Senior Estates Surveyor
Gerry Mills, Project Manager Place & Prosperity (Exmouth)
Alison Hayward, Project Manager Place & Prosperity
Jorge Pineda-Langford, Principal Building Surveyor, Property & FM
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer

Councillor apologies:

N Hookway

Chair

Date: