



LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL

Policy and Finance Committee

Date: 18 January 2021

Title: The Potential Creation of a Policy Led Document

Purpose of the Report: To draw down a maximum of £3,000 from earmarked reserves (9035/920 Professional Fees - £16,960) for the purposes of appointing a consultant to offer up recommendations on the merits or otherwise in the Town Council leading the creation of a neighbourhood plan or other similarly appropriate document to better inform parish wide improvements.

Contact Officer: Mark Saccoccio (Town Clerk)

Corporate Objective/s	LLTC Five Year Plan – aim 2	To recognise and embrace the growth of our community and to seek to influence the local authority and partners to ensure adequate infrastructure.
Implications:		
Financial	Yes	See recommendation 1.2
Human Resources	None	
Operational/Service delivery	None	
Procedural/Legal	None	
Risk/Health & Safety	None	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

Should Members be minded:-

1.1 To note the report.

1.2 To recommend to Policy and Finance Committee that a maximum of £3,000 (Budget Code 920/9035 – Professional Fees) be drawn down for the purposes of appointing a consultant to offer up recommendations on the potential merits or otherwise in the Town Council leading the creation of a neighbourhood plan or other similarly appropriate document to better inform parish wide improvements.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The benefit or otherwise in the creation of a neighbourhood plan has been the subject of much conjecture. To provide direction, the Town Council sought independent opinion in 2019 on the creation of a neighbourhood plan. At the time and on the advice offered up by the consultant, Council resolved not to pursue such a document albeit the matter would be subject to on-going review.
- 2.2 In accordance with the Policy and Finance Committee resolution made at its meeting held 21st September 2020, it was resolved that: “the merits or otherwise in the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan for the Town Centre and its hinterland be considered in 6 months’ time” at the April 2021 meeting of this committee.
- 2.3 To support Members, the purpose of this report is to endorse the appointment of a consultant to consolidate the thoughts and opinions around the subject. Through Member engagement be it workshop sessions, interview or hybrid for example, it is anticipated that the consultant would be able to identify the reasons for a town led study and in doing so, recommend the most appropriate methods or otherwise in achieving the outcomes being sought by Members.
- 2.4 As part of the appointment, it is anticipated that the consultant would liaise with the Local Authority to better understand the purpose of their work around Place Making and how a Town Council led initiative would align with this. From this, the consultant would be required to provide a recommendation on the most appropriate way(s) forward to the Town Council with the recommendations being presented to the 19th April 2021 meeting of the Policy and Finance Committee.
- 2.5 To help inform the process, an expressions of interest brief will be created which will be sent to 9 planning consultants. The following is an extract from any said document:

Appointment of Consultants

Leighton-Linslade Town Council is looking to appoint a suitably qualified consultant to provide direction on the merits or otherwise in the creation of a plan led document. As an identified growth area, the parish of Leighton-Linslade has been subject to considerable growth over the past decade with the population having increased by approximately 10% with further sizeable increases over the coming ten years.

With expansion taking place on the periphery, there is opinion that more could be done to support town centre services and meeting the needs of the existing population by way of increased investment in infrastructure. Central to this is a key town centre site known as “Land South of the High Street” which is the subject of a Development Brief (Local Authority document) which was reviewed by the Local Authority in 2016. Ownership of said site sits with a number of parties with the major landholding interest resting within the gift of the local authority that is Central Bedfordshire Council. The Town Council has no land holding interest in the site.

For the Town Council, the site represents a major opportunity and despite the best endeavours of the Local Authority there has been little tangible progress in delivery albeit timing complications to do with an elderly persons care home is a key consideration. It is understood that the Local Authority expects to create a Place Plan for all its major town centres including Leighton Buzzard and include Land South as part of this study. A commencement date is presently unknown.

Contextually, there is a divergence of opinion amongst Town Council Members on

- the merits of the Town Council carrying out any study
- the outcomes being sought and
- the influence the Town Council can have in terms of future delivery given its limited statutory powers and no land holding interests within the town centre.

In support, there is opinion that any study can be used to hold the Local Authority and other delivery agencies to account on matters surrounding “infrastructure”.

As part of the commission, the successful consultant is to meaningfully engage with Members to better understand the reasons for and outcomes they seek from any study and thereafter, provide recommendations on how best these may be achieved. It is anticipated that the consultant will use various engagement methods including a virtual workshop and 1:1 engagement for example.

The consultant is to arrive at recommended option(s) that the consultant is expected to present to the 19th April 2021 meeting of the Policy and Finance Committee. In addition, the consultant is expected to liaise with the Local Authority to understand the work it may wish to carry out around the Place Making Agenda as well as understand how it intends to bring forward the strategically important town centre site known as Land South of the High Street. The Town Council wants to ensure that any work it **may decide to carry out does not replicate or indeed compromise the work of the Local Authority given its various statutory roles.**

The recommended option(s) to be presented to the 19th April 2021 meeting are to include anticipated costs and grant funding opportunities that the Town Council may wish to explore at the appropriate time. No outcome or option should be dismissed with decision making resting with the Policy and Finance Committee.

It should be noted that the consultant will be required to tender for any future work stream that the Town Council may decide upon.

Next Steps

- 2.7 Should Members be minded supporting the recommendation, expressions of interest will be sought from 9 planning consultants who through their work within the parish sector have Neighbourhood Planning experience.

End.