

LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL

LEIGHTON-LINSLADE PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 27 APRIL 2016 AT 1930 HOURS

Present: Councillors D Bowater - CBC
 A Brandham – LLTC
 S Cotter – LLTC - in the Chair
 C Palmer – LLTC
 T Morris – LLTC
 G Perham – CBC
 A Dodwell (substituting for B Spurr) – CBC

Also in attendance: M Saccoccio (Town Clerk)
 V Cannon (Head of Economic Development)
 T Moore (Partnership Officer – maternity cover)
 S Sandiford (Corporate Governance Manager)
 G Borrelli (Chair, LB First)
 B Chandler (Chair, LB Connect)
 J Longhurst (Director of Regeneration and
 Business, Central Bedfordshire Council)
 S Hughes (Community Engagement Manager,
 Central Bedfordshire Council)
 Cllr N Young (Central Bedfordshire Council)

Members of the Public: 3
Members of the Press: 0

073/LLP APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Councillor F Kharawala, Councillor B Spurr (substituted by Councillor A Dodwell) and from Tricia Humber of the Community Forum Steering Group.

074/LLP DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members were asked to declare any interests, including the nature of those interests, which they had in any of the items under consideration at this meeting. No declarations were made and no dispensations had been requested.

075/LLP PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A member of the public spoke in respect of car parking charges, to complain about the recent increase in rates for short stays and the introduction of a flat rate charge at the West Street car park on Sundays.

Councillor N Young of Central Bedfordshire Council advised he would ask the portfolio holder for a response regarding parking charges.

076/LLP MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee received the draft minutes of the Partnership Committee meeting held on 11 February 2016.

Minute reference 065/LLP: it was noted that a Best Bar None Co-ordinator was now in post. It was understood that no progress had been made with the overgrown vegetation at Bideford Green and agreed that officers would progress this through Central Bedfordshire Council. An update was requested regarding dog signage and it was understood that signs were due to be erected imminently on Town Council owned land.

Minute reference 068/LLP: thanks were expressed to all those involved in the Business Networking Event on 20 April, for which 177 people had pre-registered and in excess of 122 people had attended.

Minute reference 070/LLP: it was clarified that the monthly meetings with market trader representatives had commenced and were proving to be a useful forum for discussion.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Partnership Committee meeting held on 11 February 2016 be approved as a correct record and were signed accordingly.

077/LLP ENABLING DELIVERY IN LEIGHTON-LINSLADE

By invitation, J Longhurst, Director of Business and Regeneration at Central Bedfordshire Council, attended the meeting to provide an update in respect of town centre regeneration, particularly regarding the aspirations for development south of the High Street.

It was clarified that Central Bedfordshire Council was seeking a mix of commercial (office/industry/manufacturing) and residential uses for the site, rather than retail or leisure led. This would bring increased footfall to the town centre. Two key tenants had been targeted and it was hoped that an update could be provided to the committee by September/October. An investment prospectus for the area had been launched and talks were ongoing with a number of organisations, as well as with prospective developers.

In light of a recent slight increase in retail vacancy rates in Leighton-Linslade and also in Biggleswade, Central Bedfordshire Council had sought a specialist retail advisor and sourced further support from the Government Department of Communities and Local Government. It was stressed that ensuring a vibrant town centre, with a diverse retail offer, remained a priority and that in future, indications were that town centres would need to provide a greater leisure and food/drink offer to attract people in.

Concerns were expressed regarding the change in direction to commercial and residential use of the site, rather than retail. Views were expressed that a significant number of residents already chose to shop outside the town in order to benefit from a wider range of outlets, particularly for clothing. The 2014

residents' survey had clearly indicated a wish from residents for a broader range of shops in the town. It was felt that an increased retail offer would anchor footfall in the town. The need for residential development was queried, given the significant housing growth to the south and east of the town.

It was confirmed that Central Bedfordshire Council was in ongoing talks with most major retailers, as well as with developers. The principal authority was actively marketing the area and ensuring that more up to date demographical data was provided to all interested parties.

The Committee was advised of the "Beyond Retail" report commissioned by the Government, which outlined the factors affecting town centres following a major, irreversible shift in shopping habits in recent years. In order to attract people, town centres would need to offer a wider range of activities including key services, leisure and food/drink outlets.

Concerns were raised regarding two factors which, alongside the change in car parking fees, were currently affecting the town centre. These were the issue of too many taxis trying to use the town centre taxi rank and the number of people staying longer than the designated 30 minutes in free spaces, due to a lack of enforcement. Councillor Young agreed to take this information back to Central Bedfordshire Council for a response from the relevant department/s.

RESOLVED to note the information.

A brief discussion took place regarding the outcome of the bid for funding by the Town Council to the Central Bedfordshire Market Towns Regeneration Fund. Disappointment at the outcome and concerns regarding the bid evaluation process were expressed.

Clarification was given that the principal authority had declined to support all proposed projects relating to WiFi provision, as this was deemed to have no longevity or sustainability. However, projects to improve shopfronts and to consider the potential for Business Improvement Districts were supported in principle and Central Bedfordshire Council would be looking at how to progress these further, throughout the authority area.

The formal response from Central Bedfordshire Council to the bid requested that confirmation be provided within ten days as to whether the Town Council wished to accept the funding and support offered through the scheme. It was explained that it was not possible to reach a Council resolution within that timeframe. The working party of Town Councillors which had originally short-listed bid projects would be discussing next steps imminently, after which an extraordinary Council meeting was likely to be called. It was likely to be mid to late May before a formal response could be provided to the local authority.

Mr Longhurst and Councillor Young left the meeting at 2044 hours.

078/LLP BUSINESS UPDATE

- (a) The Committee received a report from Central Bedfordshire Council in respect of business support initiatives, as requested at a previous meeting. A number of initiatives were taking place, including key employer visits, adult training courses and the “investment bridge” scheme.

Queries were raised regarding the promotion of schemes as it was felt that many people and businesses were unaware that these were available.

- (b) G Borelli of LB First spoke to the Committee to express concerns, passed on by group members on behalf of customers, regarding increased car parking charges. The potential impact on footfall and trade was a concern for many town centre businesses. It was understood that concerns had also been raised by the Federation of Small Businesses. A request was made of Central Bedfordshire officers as to whether a meeting could be arranged with all relevant parties present, to discuss parking concerns and potential measures to mitigate any negative impact on the town centre. A further request was for feedback regarding the success of the free Wednesday afternoon parking initiative.

Several retailers had expressed concerns about customers not being allowed to access the High Street by vehicle on market days to collect bulky items, as well as issues with deliveries on market days. The Town Council was currently considering options in respect of this.

- (c) B Chandler of LB Connect advised the Committee that the Business Networking Event had received much positive feedback and raised a lot of interest in business networking. The Town Council was thanked for its support with the event. LB Connect members were reporting that business was good.

RESOLVED to note the information.

079/LLP COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES AND WORK PLAN

The Committee received the Objectives and Work Plan for 2016-2016, updated at the previous meeting to incorporate elements from the Central Bedfordshire five year plan.

RESOLVED to note the Committee Objectives and Work Plan for 2015-2016.

The Committee received draft Objectives and Work Plan for 2016-2017, again based on the Town Council’s Three Year Plan and Central Bedfordshire’s five year plan. It was suggested that the comments in the work plan were perhaps not consistent with the discussion earlier in the meeting. It was noted that it was now proposed to bring a parking enforcement update to the June 2016 meeting and an update on youth services to the December 2016 meeting.

RESOLVED to note the draft Committee Objectives and Work Plan for 2016-2017.

080/LLP GREENSAND RIDGE WALK

The Committee received a report in respect of the Greensand Ridge Walk. As part of a wider project by The Greensand Trust and Sustrans to improve signage for the route, it was proposed that the Town Council contribute up to £3,000 for the provision of a sign marking the start/end of the route in the town centre. It was proposed and seconded that the recommendation be endorsed. On being put to the vote, the motion was carried (6 in favour, 1 against).

RESOLVED:

- (i) To endorse partnership working with The Greensand Trust in order to secure grant funding from Central Bedfordshire Council (Green Infrastructure Planning Obligations Fund) for the purposes of erecting town centre signage, to celebrate the official start of the Greensand Ridge Walk and Cycle Ride.**
- (ii) That in order to support partnership working, a maximum of £3,000 be made available from Earmarked Reserves (503/4555) for the creation and installation of said signage.**

081/LLP BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

The Committee received a budget monitoring report for the financial year 2015-2016, plus a covering report outlining committed expenditure to ongoing projects and arrangements for the 2016-17 budget. It was noted that the resolution in support of the Greensand Ridge Walk signage would reduce the town centre management budget by £3,000, from £19,499 to £16,499. Earmarked reserves remained "frozen" pending clarification of the way forward with projects included in the bid to the Market Towns Regeneration Fund.

RESOLVED to:

- (i) Note the report.**
- (ii) Carry forward all 2015-16 Earmarked Reserves into 2016-17 in order to continue delivery of existing projects, as well as the delivery of Market Town Regeneration Fund projects.**
- (iii) Utilise £6,000 of Economic Development funds (907/9018) to fund lamp post banners on West Street.**

The meeting closed at 2130 hours.

I HEREBY CONFIRM THAT THE FOREGOING IS A TRUE AND ACCURATE RECORD OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 APRIL 2016.