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## Policy and Finance Committee

**Date:** 20 September 2021

**Title:** Planning led policy document: additional considerations

**Purpose of the Report:**

To set out operational and budgetary considerations to aid Committee in determining the next course of action in respect of any recommendations it may wish to make to Council.

**Contact Officer:**

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<b>Corporate Objective/s</b>	LLTC Five Year Plan – objectives 17, 24, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 34, 41, 42, 43, 44 and 45 have previously been prioritised by Council for delivery 2019-2022	
<b>Implications:</b>		
<b>Financial</b>	Yes	Options for allocation of any likely project costs to be considered by Committee
<b>Human Resources</b>	Yes	Options for allocation of resources required to be considered by Committee
<b>Operational/Service delivery</b>	Yes	To ensure the council can continue to operate core services effectively.
<b>Procedural/Legal</b>	No	Localism Act 2011 (General Power of Competence)
<b>Risk/Health and Safety</b>	No	
<b>Environmental Aims</b>	No	

### 1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 Should Committee wish to recommend to Council that the proposal to develop a Planning led policy document (Neighbourhood Plan or other) be progressed, to also recommend the convening of an extraordinary Council meeting to clearly determine Council priorities and budgets/resources to deliver these over the coming five years.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Committee received a report at its meeting on 21 June 2021 in respect of the possible creation of a planning led policy document. At that meeting it was agreed (Minute reference 247/PF):

*It was agreed to make available additional funding for further work to inform a detailed report to the September meeting of the Committee on the advantages and disadvantages, plus the resourcing implications and costs of the recommended course of action. It was anticipated that at the September meeting, further discussion would result in recommendation/s to the September Council meeting.*

- 2.2 At the time of writing, it is clear that there are several options for Committee to consider and the specific resourcing requirements or costs of each option are difficult to quantify with any accuracy at this moment.
- 2.3 Any recommendations that the Policy and Finance Committee may wish to put forward will need to be ratified by Council. As the corporate body, the Town Council will have to decide its priority level. This is predicated on the fact that no resources (human or financial) have been committed by the Town Council for this purpose to date (other than for the creation of the two consultant reports).
- 2.4 Presently, there is no capacity within the Town Council administration. Therefore careful consideration will need to be given by Committee and Council to the likely impact on the service areas and already endorsed projects and objectives. Detailed considerations are set out below.

## **3 CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 Capacity with the Town Council staff team as we advance is extremely limited. Workstreams already endorsed by Council can be summarised as below:

- i) Core operations
- Public open spaces, play areas, sports facilities & pavilions
  - Allotments
  - Cemeteries
  - Market
  - Community events
  - Community grants
  - Civic role of Town Mayor
  - Communications
  - Public conveniences
  - Defibrillators
  - Town centre Trails

- Teenage Advice and Information Centre
- Town centre and business support
- Planning & transport liaison with Local Authority
- Community safety liaison with Bedfordshire Police
- Financial management, budget planning, risk management

There are currently 40 members of staff (albeit approximately 45% work on a part-time basis). Employees and day to day operations are managed by seven managers and two supervisors.

ii) Five Year Plan objectives

Council agreed objectives and priorities in September 2019, but some were impacted by the delays arising from the Covid-19 pandemic.

2020-2021

- Town Ranger service *Now in place following restructure*
- Drinking water fountains *Deferred due to pandemic*
- Changing Places facility in Parson's Close Recreation Ground *Delivered*
- Additional memorialisation options *Delivered*
- Scoping work for older people's projects *Delivered and workstreams now added to 2021-22 and 2022-23 as endorsed by the responsible committee*

2021-2022

- Inclusive adventure playground *Project underway*
- Consideration of overflow car parking at Linslade Memorial Playing Fields and Garden of Remembrance *Options for parking enforcement were being explored with the local authority with a view to determining if additional parking capacity is really needed*
- Projects for young people *Survey to be undertaken in Autumn 2021*
- Projects for older people *(£30k allocated for delivery)*

2022-2023

- An additional mausoleum, subject to interest *(self-funding)*
- Continued delivery of projects for older people *(£50k allocated – sub committee to be reviewed in March 2022)*
- Delivery of projects for young people resulting from the 2021 survey *(£25k allocated)*

The remaining projects were deemed longer-term (post-2022).

iii) Actions arising from the 2021-22 Risk Register Action Plan

- Byelaws to be updated
- Cemetery safety survey

- Ongoing impact on services as a result of the pandemic and changing guidance
- Documentation of procedures (risk of staff loss)
- Data protection audit & TACTIC data protection review
- Investment policy update
- Lack of clarity on the future management of public open spaces and facilities associated with the eastern urban extension
- Buildings ten-year maintenance plan
- Review condition of the skate park
- Social media audit recommendations

iv) Work arising from Motions endorsed by committee/Council

- Public realm improvements (CBC funding of equipment)
- Tree and shrub planting – various new schemes
- Investigation into potential free car parking trial
- Welcome Back Fund projects
- Investigation into the potential development of a planning led policy document
- Partnership Project list review
- S106 developer contributions review
- Boundary/governance review
- Health services
- Policy reviews
- Pigeon management in the town centre
- Liaison with the local authority over digital CCTV upgrade
- Progressing the adopted Environmental Ambitions
- Progressing the adopted Equalities Statement & actions
- Ongoing play area refurbishment programme
- Delivery of a new Living History Trail annually each October
- Finalising the last remaining work to be delivered from the Market Town Regeneration Fund (architectural lighting project).

3.3 The above is supported by the 2021-22 revenue budget (core operations) and the five-year financial plan (five-year plan objectives). Resource and financial implications arising from the Risk Register and endorsed Motions have largely been absorbed by existing staffing resources and revenue budgets/earmarked reserves, leading to the current point of zero additional capacity.

#### **4. FUNDING OPTIONS**

4.1 Should Committee recommend proceeding with a planning led policy document and once a preferred option has been endorsed by Council (at its meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> September), more detailed work can begin on scoping out likely costs which will be presented to any future extraordinary Council meeting.

- 4.2 From 2022-23, Council could consider the following options to progress additional/new workstreams. These options apply to unanticipated or additional workstreams, such as developing a planning-led policy document or any other unplanned projects/Motions.
- i) Defer a previously agreed objective to free up funds within the Future Projects earmarked reserve (as set out in the five-year financial plan, **appended below**) to hire in temporary additional staff or consultancy resources for a fixed period/project duration.
  - ii) Repurpose funds in an existing earmarked reserve (impact will need further consideration).
  - iii) Consider increasing the precept or a reduction in revenue budgets to fund the permanent recruitment of additional staffing resources. The operational implications of the latter option would need careful consideration as there would be an inevitable impact on service delivery.
- 4.2 The Town Council general reserve presently stands in the region of £808,018. The Council's Reserves Policy sets out that operating costs of between 4-6 months should be retained in the general reserve. Operating costs may vary but are estimated at £180,000 per month, meaning that the level of funds which should be maintained in the general reserve ranges from £720,000 - £1,080,000. On this basis, use of general reserves to fund additional projects is not a viable option. At this time, uncertainty surrounding the pandemic and the way the nation may be required to respond is unknown.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 Existing Town Council resources have been thinly stretched for some time due to additional, unanticipated work, which to date has been absorbed into existing workloads. This reflects employees' commitment, but it is felt that a limit has now been reached, which if exceeded could have a detrimental impact on individuals and their families. The Town Council as the employer, has a duty of care to staff to ensure their on-going wellbeing.
- 5.2 By way of the five-year plan, the Council has created earmarked reserves. A five-year financial plan demonstrated forward-thinking and commitment to the continual investment in facilities and services to benefit the residents of Leighton-Linslade.
- 5.3 Should Committee/Council be minded to progress this project or any other unplanned/unanticipated projects further, the above options will need to be given detailed consideration. Council will also need to consider factors such as existing staffing and workload, continuing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, proposed additional staffing costs arising from recent Government proposals, increased accommodation costs.

5.4 In order to give this the detailed consideration required, it is suggested that an additional meeting of Council be scheduled to agree priorities, resources and funding for the short-medium term.

**End.**

Leighton-Linslade Town Council  
5 Year Financial Plan

Appendix A

Future Projects	2020/2021	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025	Totals
	Actual YTD	Budget	Budget	Budget	Budget	Budget	
<b>Democratic and Central Services</b>							
IT Provision		2,916			7,500	25,000	35,416
<b>Grounds and Environmental Services</b>							
Play Areas	97,903	114,325	82,000	82,000	82,000	82,000	442,325
Parsons Close Adventure Playground			300,000				300,000
CCTV			40,000				40,000
Cemetery Chapel & Lych Gate					125,000		125,000
Drinking Water Fountains			25,000				25,000
Potential Youth Capital Project *					250,000		250,000
<b>Cultural and Economic Services</b>							
Living History Trail			11,608				11,608
Pigeon Project			40,000				40,000
Older Persons Project			50,000	30,000			80,000
Younger Persons Project			25,000	25,000			50,000
<b>Expenditure</b>		117,241	573,608	137,000	464,500	107,000	1,399,349
<b>External Funding (PWLB)</b>			-300,000				-300,000
<b>Budget Requirement</b>		117,241	273,608	137,000	464,500	107,000	1,099,349

\* In accordance with Objective 45 of the 5 Year Plan which will be subject to future parish engagement