

RESOURCES POLICY ADVISORY GROUP (SBDC)

Meeting - 22 March 2018

Present: B Gibbs (Chairman)
R Bagge, D Dhillon, P Hogan and J Jordan

Apologies for absence: None

33. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of the Policy Advisory Group (PAG) held on 7 December 2017 and 29 January 2018 were received.

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

35. STATION ROAD CAR PARK DEVELOPMENT GERRARDS CROSS

It was agreed by the Chairman that a late report be considered on the redevelopment of Station Road Car Park in Gerrards Cross, due to the need to progress the project within the desired timeframe.

The PAG noted that a planning application had previously been made to redevelop Station Road car park in November 2015 however the application was withdrawn in August 2016. Two car park studies had since been carried out indicating a need for an increased number of parking spaces in Gerrards Cross. Discussions were ongoing with Chiltern Railways to explore the possibility of developing additional commuter parking at the Station; however this would still not meet the potential extra need for visitors, shoppers, workers and businesses.

Members were advised that, although 3 potential schemes were included in the report, only the full size scheme would meet the potential additional need and be cost effective. Due to the need to work with Waitrose and the other businesses of the town, construction of the new car park would need to take place between Easter and Christmas to minimise disruption to trading. It was hoped that construction would begin on the project in April 2019 with partial completion by Christmas 2019, subject to planning permission being granted and the approval of a full business case by Cabinet.

In response to a question raised over whether it would be possible to delay construction until after the management contract with Waitrose ended in 2022, the PAG were advised that the need for additional parking was urgent and should be addressed as soon as possible. It was felt that Waitrose's expectations for 90 allocated spaces were unrealistic but discussions were ongoing to gain their support for the scheme. It was noted that the costs incurred from working with Waitrose would not significantly increase the overall cost of the project.

Members were informed that the revised design proposals had the support of the Town Council and local businesses. Although the building would be located in an aesthetically sensitive area, cladding would be installed to help mitigate the effect of the building on residents living in its immediate vicinity. It was noted that residents' concerns would be taken into account during the planning process as far as possible.

Overall, the PAG felt that a clear need for extra parking spaces was proven and agreed that the project should proceed in order to meet this need subject to planning permission and the approval of a full business case.

Having considered the advice of the PAG, the Portfolio Holder **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet:

- To confirm the aspiration is to provide the full scheme of 443 car park spaces with slight design changes and that a planning application should be submitted.
- To approve the budget to resubmit the planning application and associated fees.
- That a full business case for the scheme be submitted to Cabinet for approval at a later date.

36. **REDEVELOPMENT OF FORMER GERRARDS CROSS POLICE STATION SITE**

The PAG received a report which sought to update Members on the redevelopment of the former Gerrards Cross Police Station site, following concerns raised at the joint Resources and Healthy Communities PAG regarding increased construction costs.

Members were informed that typical budget construction cost estimates for residential developments had been obtained from local developers and the revised cost estimate from the framework contractor fell within the range of local market testing. The revised estimate represented a significant overall cost reduction, which had been achieved through design efficiencies.

It was noted that an application for the redevelopment had been submitted to the Planning Committee for approval, which was due to be determined on 28 March 2018. However, the application had been delayed due to the possibility that a condition may be required by the County Ecological Officer that an Ecological survey be carried out at the site. It was hoped that the application would now be considered by the Planning Committee in April 2018 in order to meet the desired timetable for the development.

In response to a question regarding the recommendation to obtain 100% cost certainty, the PAG were advised that the framework contractor would provide a fixed price for the project within 12 weeks which would not exceed the target cost. The alternative option of an open tendering exercise would add 6-7 months to the project timescale without a guarantee of a reduction in cost.

A concern was raised over the build quality of the affordable housing units being delivered as part of the development. Members were advised that internal furnishings would be functional, durable and cost effective.

In relation to the Summary Project Cost estimates, Members were advised that the demolition cost had not been included in the original estimate total. Any decontamination costs would be funded by TVP under the terms of the sale agreement. This had led to uncertainty over the total reduction in the cost of the project following the revised estimate, however the reduction was significant. It was noted that a clearer set of figures would be submitted in the report to Cabinet and would be made available to Resources PAG Members. The PAG supported the recommendations on the condition that the overall cost reduction was significant.

Having considered the advice of the PAG, the Portfolio Holder **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet:

1. To note the current position and the draft business case following the revised cost estimate received from the framework contractor.
2. To proceed with obtaining 100% cost certainty at a cost of £100,000 which is within the allocated £800,000 agreed by Cabinet on 8 February 2017 with a further report to be presented on the detailed business plan before moving to the development phase subject to planning consent being achieved.

37. **COST OF HOMELESSNESS**

Members received a report on the cost of homelessness which had been requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Homelessness Management Task and Finish Group. The report highlighted the staffing costs of the Joint Homelessness/Housing Options team and related costs for the Legal and Finance teams. It also detailed the accommodation costs which had increased significantly year on year since 2014/15. Members noted that the overall direct cost of homelessness to the Council in 2017/18 was approximately £650,000.

It was highlighted that projects were underway targeting a reduction in homelessness costs, including recovery of housing benefit, fraud detection and the development of capital projects which would improve the provision of temporary and affordable housing. Although efforts had been made to recover client contributions, Members were advised that a number of debts had been written off. A report would be brought to a future PAG meeting detailing all write offs across the Council for Members' information.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

38. **TREASURY MANAGEMENT - QUARTERLY REPORT Q3 2017/18**

The PAG considered a report on the Treasury Management performance for Quarter 3 2017/18. It was noted that £14 million was held in external deposits which had returned an average interest rate of 0.51%. An additional £5.8 million was available in an instant access account to cover precept payments. Members were advised that the forecast investment return for 2017/18 was £70,000 less than expected due to the continued low rate of interest.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Resources Policy Advisory Group (SBDC) - 22 March 2018

The meeting terminated at 6.50 pm