

HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL
EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL 29th September 2020

MINUTES OF MEETING

At the start of the meeting the Mayor confirmed that it was taking place under the provisions of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 Sections Four and Five.

Present: The Right Worshipful the Mayor Councillor Kath Hey and Councillors Andrews, Butler, Foxton, Milln, Oliver, Stevens, Tillet, Tyler, Wilcox and Williams.

Councillor Hornsey arrived at 16.09 pm and Councillor Oliver left at 16.47 pm.

In attendance: Steve Kerry Town Clerk, Becci O'Reilly Committees, Events and Contracts Officer, Christian Dangerfield and Ivan Annibal from Rose Regeneration.

C2020/21.35 CONFIRMATION OF MEMBER ACCESS TO THE MEETING

The Mayor confirmed that all members were able to see and hear the proceedings. Councillor Oliver was able to see, hear and to be heard but not seen.

C2020/21.36 CONFIRMATION OF PUBLIC ACCESS

The Committees, Events and Contracts Officer confirmed that the meeting was being live streamed on Facebook and was also being recorded.

C2020/21.37 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were noted from Councillors Boulter, Dykes, Kenyon, Powell and Toynbee. The Mayor read a message from Councillor Powell regarding a possible member working party on the main item on the agenda.

C2020/21.38 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

C2020/21.39 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None.

C2020/21.40 STRONGER TOWNS BOARD

Christian Dangerfield introduced himself and his colleague Ivan Annibal, the former Assistant Director for Regeneration for Lincolnshire County Council, and now working as a consultant to Stronger Towns Boards seeking to use the Towns Fund. The background of a £25m package per town of funding to "level up" economic activity was explained. The thrust of the government policy is to recognise that publicly funded regeneration initiatives have tended to be focused on the large conurbations and smaller population centres such as the larger market town and smaller cities of the UK have been missed to some extent. Mr Annibal's experience includes working with Lincoln City, and a combined initiative from Skegness and Mablethorpe called the Connected Coast. He was also involved with Boston and Newark in the formulating of their plans.

The Towns Fund is delivered in the tranches. Some projects have already started, the fund having been set up in November 2019 as an initiative of the Secretary of State Robert Jenrick MP. It operates differently from previous funding packages in that the towns do not compete with each other for a slice of a large cake, the offer is a potential £25m each for suitable schemes. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to make a real difference to a community like Hereford. The three tranches were completed, or to be completed, on 31st July (16 towns), 31st October (most) and at the end of January, which is the remainder including Hereford. At this point a definitive list of projects is required to go forward for funding decisions. These need to be substantially complete with architect's drawings of any proposed buildings or infrastructure and costings. It is much more a process of negotiating than the competitive bidding local government is more used to, so prior experience of other bids may not be as helpful as we might expect. The accountable public body is Herefordshire Council which means their S151 officer (Andrew Lovegrove) must sign off the bid as financially sound.

This is now moving forward at some pace, with Christian as the main local person for the consultation and formation stage, with Ivan visiting regularly and drawing on his wide experience to provide support. There is a Stronger Towns Board (STB) made up of a wide range of stakeholders and the Mayor represents the City Council on that. The main point is to look at priorities for projects from the city and pass them on to Christian.

Christian added that the initial focus is stakeholder engagement. The object is to harvest ideas and ambitions, to be aware of all the possible projects and to condense them into a viable set of business cases. This will be resolved by the STB. He has already had one to one conversations with business leaders, community groups and the Council and will form forums for up to eight sector groups. There will be an extensive media campaign on TV, radio, website and social media outlets. At the end of that first stage there should be a long list of ideas and then the task is to find the most feasible and effective projects to include. The effects should last for decades.

There followed a lengthy question and answer session, the salient points from which are set out below.

How is the final vote taken, noting that the Enterprise Zone (which is treated as part of the City for this purpose) has already had a lot of investment and some areas of the City have had little or none? The bid must reflect the three themes of skills and enterprise, transport connectivity and urban regeneration in the public realm. The acid test is economic benefit, so an infrastructure project like a new car park must have an economic case. For example Mablethorpe included a new car park to facilitate access to beach side businesses and thereby showed how the infrastructure would support economic growth. This process might throw up really good ideas that aren't suitable for the Towns Fund, but the start of bids elsewhere.

Where do the two established but not yet funded major city projects of a transport hub and associated multi-storey car park and the development of a diverse offer on the Maylord site fit into this? Actually very well as both appear to have substantial economic arguments to back them up. Lincoln and East Midlands Rail have come up with a similar plan which has been included. Part of the Towns Fund rationale is to re-purpose the high street, so a mixed development at Maylord to reduce retail space but make that which remains more viable alongside workshops, crafts, educational or residential would be considered. However, the bid is for no more than £25m so if a substantial part is on one scheme (Lincoln's transport hub

is costed at £8m) then their needs to be a very strong case to justify such a large slice of the cake.

The major issue with connectivity is the divide of the river, how can this be addressed? To an outsider Hereford looks like one city but in fact it is divided, with a nearly separate community to the south with very poor links. This is a real issue with the centralisation of primary health care on the Station Approach site for instance, and the predominance of higher education provision north of the river. Health has an economic element to it and relevant bids for connected local services could be included. It is important to have a mixed economy of small and larger elements and to be ambitious. It was noted that the Mayor and Councillor Stevens (who attends STB as the BID Chair) have already flagged up the north/south connectivity issues as a major concern.

Arts and culture are very important, in themselves and as part of the local economy and tourism offer. How does this relate? A clear exposition of what Hereford is about as a place and as an offer is important, it is the context of the bid and clearly arts, heritage, culture and tourism are really significant factors in that. It is a good idea not to be “identikit” but to go for a distinctive local narrative. It was noted that the City Council has soft launched its new website and this would be used to carry Towns Fund material as part of the publicity effort.

Does the STB have a website? Not yet but it will be up very soon. On a wider issue, Newark have a very good section covering their projects and it is a very good way to see what can be done. All the towns in the first tranche are now in the public domain with their information so there is much to gain from seeing what has gone well in other areas, remembering though to make a unique Hereford bid. The key strength of the best ones is the balance of economic growth with wellbeing. There is already a “My Town” site which has over 100 responses from Hereford residents. The site “Connected Coast” is also a useful place to see good projects.

What is the timescale for initial decisions? The STB will review ideas collated at the end of November and make the initial decisions on what will be developed to feasibility stage. The Mayor added that part of the reason for coming together in an extraordinary council meeting was to form a working group of members to progress this quickly.

Getting all this up and running will take time and effort, is there any funding to support this work? Yes, a fund of £170,000 is held by Herefordshire Council, about £70,000 of which is already committed, leaving around £100,000 for the detailed feasibility work on selected projects. The standard is technically RIBA Stage II which requires quite a high level of detail. It was noted that any councillor time from the City will be voluntary and any officer time will be within current salary budgets, but with the opportunity cost that other activities might be sidelined while this is prioritised.

Is it necessary to have a specific balance between the three themes? No. It is a good idea to have some balance; but if there had recently been a major transport initiative in an area it would be permissible to focus on the other themes and just note that there was no great need of further investment in the area that had already been covered by a recent scheme. There is a lot of detailed guidance in the Intervention Framework published by the government and heritage is shown as a sub strand within economic regeneration so heritage projects with an economic pay back can be included, and should be.

It was noted that while the meeting was taking place citizens had already started to respond on Facebook with suggestions. As soon as the Town Plan portal is open these will be redirected

to Christian who will begin the urgent task of collating them with all the other ideas that come forward. It was pleasing to see that residents were already interacting with the proposals through the live streaming of the council meeting.

The Mayor asked for nominations for the working group and the Clerk advised that there was no fixed number but it would be a good idea to have a geographical spread across the City.

It was then proposed by the Mayor, seconded by Councillor Stevens and unanimously

RESOLVED That the Working Group members be Councillors Hornsey, Milln, Powell, Tyler, Wilcox and Williams.

In answer to a question it was confirmed that the maximum capacity of the committee room at the Town Hall under Covid rules is six, so meetings might be zoom or physical, perhaps with sub groups within that working group.

The Mayor thanked Christian and Ivan for a very interesting presentation and for very full and helpful answers to questions.

C2020/21.41 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of Council will be Tuesday 17th November 2020 at 6:00 pm

There being no further business, the Mayor declared the meeting closed at 5:15 pm

Signed

Date