

TOWN DEAL

18 JANUARY 2023

Present:

Carole Dixon (Chair)	Hastings Community Network
Cllr Maya Evans	Deputy Leader, Hastings Borough Council
James Harris	East Sussex County Council
Jane Hartnell	Hastings Borough Council
Jess Steele	White Rock Neighbourhood Ventures
John Bownas	Hastings Business Improvement District
Justin Thomas	NewRiver REIT
Liz Coleman	Hastings and Rother Interfaith Forum
Sally-Ann Hart	MP for Hastings and Rye
Sean Dennis	Hastings Area Chamber of Commerce
Steve Manwaring	Hastings Voluntary Action

Others in attendance:

Kevin Boorman	Hastings Castle project lead, HBC
Nigel Stewardson	Department for Levelling Up, Homes & Communities

HBC Programme Team present:

Hannah Collins
Ian Sycamore
Pranesh Datta
Stephen Dodson
Allison San Diego

93. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Everyone was welcomed to the meeting.

Hannah Collins, Communications Manager at Hastings Borough Council will be covering Town Deal communications matters for the interim was welcomed to the meeting. Hannah explained that shops in the town centre are slowly re-opening following the recent flooding and thanked everyone for their help.

Apologies have been received from: Graham Peters, Darrell Gale, Kate Adams, Richard Moore, Richard Watson, Sonia Blizzard and Victoria Conheady.

94. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Jess Steele pointed out that with the funding re-allocation item on the agenda, there is a clear interest for project leads present, including herself. She also declared an interest in the Hastings Castle project due to her recent involvement in the project and a proposal she is currently putting together.

TOWN DEAL

18 JANUARY 2023

95. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

Accepted as an accurate record.

Matters arising:

- Page 3, item 91, second paragraph under 'Town Deal programme update' – Homes England is organising stakeholder engagement meetings and should be contacting Hastings Commons if they haven't already
- Page 4, 3rd paragraph under 'Decisions of the Town Deal Investment Panel' – Right to Buy information is included in the programme update report (item 4)

96. PROGRAMME PROGRESS UPDATE

- **Town Deal Programme update**

Pranesh Datta, Economic Development Manager at HBC explained that Right to Buy has been considered in depth by HBC in an early project, York buildings. Although the scheme carries some risk, this is minimal for the first 10 years and only increases in year 11. It is difficult for the council to avoid this as the legislation exists and it is important for the council to engage while it has the opportunity to try and address the housing crisis and work within the boundaries that exist.

Questions on the housing crisis will be dealt with outside of this meeting and referred by HBC colleagues to the housing team.

The possibility of putting properties into a trust or putting a local occupancy clause on the properties should be considered due to the risks involved. This will be referred to the housing team and reported back to the next meeting. **Action: Pranesh**

- **Decisions of the Town Deal Investment Panel**

Ian Sycamore, External Funding Manager at HBC explained that Hastings Castle project business case was approved by the Town Deal Investment Panel at its meeting on 15th December 2022.

It was clarified that the investment panel is a subgroup of the town deal board, and its decision is to approve the project business case which has been assessed externally and the concept of the project as it currently stands to proceed, is to be noted by the board. This approval does not exclude other ideas of concepts that may come up in the future to support the project. Assuming the Department for Levelling Up, Homes & Communities (DLUHC) approves the project summary document, the project can proceed to the next stage of development.

The investment panel's decision was noted by the meeting.

TOWN DEAL

18 JANUARY 2023

Nigel explained that he has reviewed the summary document and monitoring and evaluation plan for the project, and a DLUHC decision should be received in a week or so.

- **Re-allocation of Town Fund monies and update on redevelopment of Priory Street Car Park and the West Wing of the Priory Meadow Shopping Centre**

Pranesh summarised the reasons and context for re-allocation, the options and the next steps to the meeting.

There was general agreement that a significant uplift to the Public Realm and Green Connections project should be supported. The following comments were made:

- The public realm project has already been identified as having best value for money and a high level of certainty. Major improvements are needed in the town centre and anything to improve the public realm, make it more attractive and to help to avoid future flooding should be done
- Other unfinished existing projects could benefit from re-allocation of some of the funds. Consideration should be given to re-allocating 80% to the public realm project and 20% to others, not just to complete the projects but to help them become highly successful and thrive
- Re-allocating 75% of the funds to the public realm project and 25% to other projects should also be considered due to inflationary pressures, particularly in construction costs, that have been faced by everyone since the town deal started This would have to be discussed with the investment panel and DLUHC
- General re-allocation in an attempt to save unviable projects should not be considered
- ESCC is the public realm project lead. Although the project has been assessed as having a high level of certainty, it will still be subject to traffic regulation orders, considerations by planning committees, and discussions with Southern Water to establish their plans for the area which may or may not have a significant effect on the flooding issues in the town centre. The project will partly contribute positively to the flooding issues but will not solve them completely. Once the design consultation and tendering process has been completed costs and how much of the project can be delivered will become clearer
- The work in Arup's initial report cost £10m but only £3.4m was available to the project. If the project is allocated 80% or 75% more funding this may enable delivery of more of the project
- Homes England has started their first piece of work; their officers have visited the town several times and key stakeholder engagement has started on the Station Gateway study. Work has commenced but a firm commitment is yet to be made
- The Priory Meadow west wing was previously identified as possibly capable of delivering new homes in the town. It is important that the Station Gateway study not only focuses on Priory Street but also extends across to Middle Street and over into Queens Square and to the south of the train station. NewRiver REIT is not

TOWN DEAL

18 JANUARY 2023

reliant on Homes England, although unfortunately the challenges to the council meant the Priory Meadow redevelopment project could not go ahead

- Clarification on the justification of £5.5m additional funding to the public realm project and what this would deliver was asked for. If the re-allocation to the project was to be less, i.e., £3.5m, this would allow a bit more flexibility in other areas of the programme.
- It is also important that delivery of the public realm project is not just by the county council but also by the community (Garden Town Team) who initiated it, especially if it becomes the biggest town deal project
- The castle project is not currently good value for money and has high risk but could be turned around and the benefit cost ratio improved if additional funding could be provided
- The Observer Building is already part of the programme and has planning permission to build 15 flats which already have windows in. Hastings Commons does not have the funds available to build these flats and cannot source the funds from Homes England without becoming a registered provider. The flats could be built in the next 2 years with an injection of funding
- All projects leads could be asked what they could do with extra funding, some may not be able to use extra funding, or justify the need for it
- DLUHC, as a department understands the housing aspirations of any town, however with this specific town deal, the involvement of Homes England puts the funding at risk if a project adjustment request cannot be delivered by the end of March
- It was explained that DLUHC is working with 101 towns which are all working to a very tight timescale and further extensions cannot be given as funds are only available up to a certain time. DLUHC fully supports the Homes England work but this is unfortunately outside of the timelines of the Towns Fund and was not part of the original Town Investment Plan

All comments from the board will be considered by the Investment Panel prior to any final decision. Further feedback is welcome from board members up to 27th January either in writing to Towndeal@hastings.gov.uk or via phone call to Pranesh on 01424 451784.

The chair thanked everyone for their valuable contributions.

- **Future of the Town Deal Board**

Ian explained that there is a proposal that the function of this board continues as it is and meetings are scheduled quarterly, and any requests to join the board are considered on a 6-monthly basis by the co-chairs. In addition, the future of the investment panel will need to be considered if there are no more business cases to go through for approval.

- **Business case progress report by theme**

Noted.

TOWN DEAL

18 JANUARY 2023

- **Communications update**

Noted.

- **Equalities Impact Assessment**

The programme is committed to produce an equalities impact assessment. The consultant carrying out this work has met with project leads and it is hoped a report and action plan can be circulated to project leads and to the board in March.

- **Programme finance update**

Noted.

- **Staff changes**

A full-time replacement for Ruby will be recruited and Hannah is covering communications matters for the interim.

Any questions on the contents of the report can be directed to the team:

Towndeal@hastings.gov.uk

97. **PROJECT UPDATES**

Hastings Castle

Kevin Boorman, Marketing and Major Projects Manager from Hastings Borough Council explained:

- Following recent approval of the business case, the project is still in its very early stages
- A statement of significance has been produced as the castle is a scheduled monument
- Engagement with various organisations has taken place, including schools and colleges, Hastings Academy, Hastings Youth Council, many local attractions, English Heritage tourist guides, Hastings Area Archeology Research Group and at the town deal open day on 15th October
- An online survey attracted around 1000 responses
- HBC cabinet approval for the project will now be sought
- Project costs is one of the huge challenges. The project is still a concept and firm proposals and drawings are still needed. Work is not due to start on site until the third quarter of 2024 so will be difficult to get firm costs for the work at this stage

TOWN DEAL

18 JANUARY 2023

- A project design team and architect will be appointed to get some firm plans costed up, bearing in mind the risks and sensitivities for the site and making the West Hill lift accessible by doing some work at the top of the lift will be a challenge
- The bridge from Ladies Parlour across to the castle had to be removed from this phase of the project as this would be difficult and too risky to provide and was in danger of impacting the whole project
- An update will be given to the town deal board once the project is worked up a bit further

Jess added that she has met with Kevin and there have also been a number of community meetings and a potential answer to challenges that have been raised to do with access and public space. St. Mary in the Castle is at the foot of the castle and could be the visitor centre which could be connected by a lift and would address the access problems. The project group has been convened by Hastings Creatives and hosted by Hastings Commons and the next meeting is taking place tomorrow (19th January at 2:30pm at the Observer Building). A proposal will be submitted to HBC by 4th February which is the deadline for expressions of interest for the St. Mary in the Castle.

98. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 11:00, THURSDAY, 27TH APRIL 2023**