

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 23 February 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the **Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **23 February 2023** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr S A Wilson
Vice-Chairman: Cllr Mrs J E McPherson

Cllr R P Constable
Cllr A H Eves
Cllr Mrs E P Gadsdon
Cllr J R F Mason
Cllr R Milne

Cllr G W Myers
Cllr J E Newport
Cllr L J Newport
Cllr D W Sharp
Cllr M G Wilkinson

VISITING MEMBERS

Cllrs Mrs D L Belton, J E Cripps, D S Efde, I A Foster, Mrs L Shaw, D J Sperring, I H Ward and A L Williams

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J N Gooding, Mrs J R Gooding and R Lambourne.

SUBSTITUTES

Cllr M Hoy - for Cllr R Lambourne

OFFICERS PRESENT

E Yule - Strategic Director
P Barnes - Director of Assets & Investment
C Mayhew - Corporate Manager, Democratic Services, Brentwood Borough Council
J O'Brien - Corporate Services Officer

ALSO PRESENT

N Binder - Manager, South Essex Parking Partnership, Sustainable Communities
J Pennington - Trustee, South Essex Community Hub
D Preston - Chief Operating Officer, South Essex Community Hub
J Edmunds - Voluntary Chief Executive, DesignCabin
R Sorjonen - DesignCabin
J Sawford - Charity Director, MegaCentre
S Williams - Megacentre
E Bonney - Megacentre

44 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

45 SOUTH ESSEX PARKING PARTNERSHIP (SEPP)

A verbal update on the work of the South Essex Parking Partnership within the Rochford District was provided by Mr N Binder, Manager, South Essex Parking Partnership.

Members asked that the presentation be provided to Committee Members.

Members asked questions in respect of the amount of patrols in the District, the length of time for restrictions to be put in place, concerns relating to parking restrictions at local schools, including Highway Code breaches by sixth form students, the misuse of disabled parking, enforcement on clearways and weight limits on roads.

A Member commented that the Police and Trading Standards determined road weight limits.

46 THE MILL ARTS & EVENTS CENTRE – OUTCOME OF THE COMMUNITY EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST PROCESS AND FUTURE OPERATING COSTS

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Assets & Investment setting out details of the outcome to date of the Community Expression of Interest process and the required operating costs following the decision of the Executive on 13 July 2022.

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning & Assets stated:

“I would like to paint a picture of a shared vision for the Mill Hall Arts & Events Centre where it could become a fully operational theatre with the ability to stage a variety of events, as well as being available for the many community and social groups throughout the Town and District who would use the Mill Hall at various times, whilst making a possible permanent space available for the arts, and culture whilst not forgetting the rich historical heritage that abounds within the Town and the surrounding District. All of this would need to be supported by a fully functional café and bar facility, providing a welcoming atmosphere, to the users of the Mill Hall, whilst providing a financial contribution that will help and support all the facilities that this vision endeavours to provide. I would just like to pause for a moment to let that sweeping opening statement to sink in.

We have a Mill Hall that is currently open, providing a Council Reception Service whilst taking bookings for events, but it in no way comes near to the vision I have mentioned in that opening statement. A vision which I hope each member of the Committee tonight shares with me, and I hope each and every one can buy into a constructive way forward. It's a vision I would wish to bring to fruition. But it can only happen with your positive help and long-term support.

I recognise you will have many questions to ask that we at this time may not be unable to give a satisfactory answer too, as we are at the very beginning of the journey ourselves, together with the help of those partners who have expressed

their interest in being a fundamental part of this journey to accomplish this vision. But one answer I can give, we can't do it without your help and support.

What you have before you this evening in item 7 are the basic current and future operating costs, plus the required capital investment needed to satisfy the objectives and vision for the Mill Hall Arts & Events Centre, and I would like to highlight those objectives

Based on the discussions held through the community expression of interest process, officers determined it would not be financially sustainable for the Mill Arts & Events Centre to be operated by the community expressions of interest process for the following reasons:

1. The building needs significant capital investment totalling £1.250 million over a 15-year period; the building is currently not making enough revenue to offset this capital investment. Possible tenants would not want to take on the risk and responsibility of those works highlighted.
2. The current operating costs are significantly high due to the age and design of the building, making it difficult for the community expression of interests to quantify a financial return to the Council increasing the risk to the Council that the operation of the building could come back into the Council's remit.
3. The Council needs to determine the long-term objectives for the site to determine how to operate the Mill Arts & Events Centre with involvement from all stakeholders, including the Design Cabin and the MegaCentre.

We need you as members to be part of that regeneration process, hence we have asked that it be brought to O&S to look at the initial requirements as a critical friend and to support it, to enable the Mill Hall Arts & Events Centre to be fully operational.

We do have some formative ideas on how the project could be managed, and if we needed to create a special purpose vehicle, what would it look like? For example: a Community Trust, but we will be open to all suggestions.

We will try and answer any questions as best we can, bearing in mind we are looking primarily at factual evidence presented within this report, but fundamentally we are all at the very beginning of this journey in making this vision a reality".

The Chairman welcomed Mr John Pennington (Trustee) and Mr David Preston (Chief Operating Officer) from South Essex Community Hub, Mr James Edmunds (Voluntary Chief Executive) and Ms Ronja Sorjonen from DesignCabin, Ms Julie Sawford (Charity Director), Mr Scott Williams and Ms Elizabeth Bonney from MegaCentre to the meeting.

In response to questions relating to how the various organisations had found the expressions of interest process, future vision for the Mill Arts & Events

Centre and whether they would be interested in applying again in the future, the following responses were noted:-

- no clear guidance had been provided during the process, the goal posts had kept moving, openness and transparency was required, there had been a lack of communication and there was no consistent brief and no support from the Council.
- ideas for the Mill Arts & Events Centre included a café, live music and a community hub and the organisations were willing to work together to achieve the best results for the Mill Arts & Events Centre.

Members were concerned by the above feedback from the organisations in terms of both time and money wasted and the impact the process had had on the organisations' faith in the Council. Members thanked the organisations for attending the meeting and emphasised that the process should have been officer-led rather than via Facebook. Members highlighted the need for a clear policy to safeguard that expenditure incurred was essential and for this issue to be included on the Committee's work plan for next year.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning & Assets stated that on his appointment as Portfolio Holder with responsibility for assets he was aware of the financial problems associated with the Mill Arts & Events Centre. He apologised on behalf of the Council and welcomed all that had been included in the discussion.

Cllr A H Eves moved a Motion, seconded by Cllr Mrs J E McPherson that any future model for the Mill Arts & Events Centre is clear and be brought to Full Council for discussion and this was carried unanimously on a show of hands.

Cllr J R F Mason moved a Motion, seconded by Cllr M G Wilkinson that the previous decision to deploy the assets disposal policy be rescinded in the interests of exploring all operating models and associated business cases and this was carried on a show of hands.

Cllr M Hoy moved a Motion, seconded by Cllr Mrs J E McPherson, that a cross Party Working Group be set up to steer the process and this was carried on a show of hands.

Cllr J R F Mason moved a Motion, seconded by Cllr A H Eves, that we revisit, following meaningful market research, the costs of improvement works to the Mill Hall taking into account the needs of a modern media facility and this was carried unanimously on a show of hands.

Cllr R P Constable moved a Motion, seconded by Cllr Mrs E P Gadsdon, that the figures for demolition of the existing building and re-building a purpose built facility are brought to Council for consideration, which was lost on a show of hands.

Cllr Mrs J E McPherson moved a Motion, seconded by Cllr Mrs E P Gadsdon, that during the process external funding options are investigated either by RDC or a partner for the works needed and this was carried on a show of hands.

Cllr J R F Mason moved a Motion, seconded by Cllr M Hoy, that the expressions of interest process is started afresh and that the invitation to submit an EOI is republished against the revised vision for the Mill Hall and this was carried on a show of hands.

Cllr S A Wilson moved a Motion, seconded by Cllr Mrs J E McPherson, that the Council adopts the use of a collaborative procurement and this was carried on a show of hands.

Cllr J R F Mason moved a Motion, seconded by Cllr L J Newport, that before the Executive determines this matter it is brought to an Extraordinary meeting of Council for debate before the commencement of the pre-Election period and this was carried on a show of hands.

Recommended to the Executive

- (1) That any future model for the Mill Hall Arts & Events Centre is clear and be brought to Full Council for discussion.
- (2) That the previous decision to deploy the asset disposal policy be rescinded in the interests of exploring all operating models and associated business cases.
- (3) That a cross Party Working Group is set up to steer the process.
- (4) That we revisit, following meaningful market research, the costs of improvement works to the Mill Hall taking into account the needs of a modern media facility.
- (5) That during the process, external funding options are investigated either by RDC or a partner for the works needed.
- (6) That the Expressions of Interest process is started afresh and that the invitation to submit an EOI is republished against the revised vision for the Mill Hall.
- (7) That the Council adopts the use of a collaborative procurement.
- (8) That before the Executive determines the matter, it is brought to an Extraordinary meeting of Council for debate before the commencement of the pre-Election period. (DAI)

The Chairman moved a Motion without notice, seconded by Cllr D W Sharp, according to Committee Procedure Rule 9(N) to extend the meeting for as long as practicable in order to complete this business and this was carried on a show of hands.

47 KEY DECISIONS DOCUMENT

The Committee noted the contents of the Key Decisions Document.

48 WORK PLAN

The Committee discussed and noted the contents of the work plan and it was further noted that the review of the expressions of interest process for the Mill Arts & Events Centre should also be included.

The meeting closed at 10.45 pm.

Chairman

Date

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