

8. BETTER MID SUSSEX PROJECT ANNUAL REPORT 2010

REPORT OF: Tim Barkley – Better Mid Sussex Planning Leader
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Wards Affected: All
Key Decision No

Purpose of Report

1. To present the annual report to Members on the individual work streams within the project following the termination of the Framework Agreement with our development partner in March 2010.

Summary

2. This is the first annual report since the demise of the partnership with Thornfield Properties PLC and focuses on the steps taken by the Council to move on. The report also identifies projects that are expected to make good progress in 2011

Recommendations

3. **The Advisory Group is requested to consider and comment on the annual report**
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Objectives of the Project

4. Following the demise of our development partner, Cabinet met in June 2010 to consider what steps to take and they made a number of recommendations to Council, including the formation of an Advisory Group. Council agreed to the formation of the Better Mid Sussex Advisory Group [BMSAG] with the following terms of reference: -

To oversee the town centre revitalisation project, and advise Cabinet as appropriate.

The objective of the group is to progress the master plan for each town centre including seeking to achieve the following outcomes: -

- The development of strong and successful town centres;
- The development of new retail and commercial floor space, including residential development, where this is possible;
- Where relevant, in the particular town centre, the provision of new / replacement / refurbished community buildings and improved public realm;
- The enhancement of the accessibility of each centre, including car parking and public transport;
- The improvement to the environment in each town centre

Background

5. Thornfield Properties PLC have now been wound up and the administrators have advised the Council they are in the process of winding up the affairs of Thornfield Properties (Mid Sussex) Limited and Thornfield Properties East Grinstead Limited.

6. The administrators advised the Council in November 2010 of an approach by a developer to take an assignment of the East Grinstead Development Agreement. Cabinet considered this matter at their meeting on 6th December 2010 and resolved to terminate the Agreement. The Solicitor to the Council served notice on 22nd December 2010. At the same meeting, Cabinet also accepted the advice from the BMSAG to withdraw the East Grinstead Landowner Brief, once revised community requirements from a scheme involving Council owned land had been agreed.
7. The BMSAG met three times in 2010 and heard from East Grinstead Town Council, Haywards Heath Town Council, West Sussex County Council, Solum Regeneration, Mr C Martell, the major landowner at Queens Walk, East Grinstead and from a local architect with an idea for a scheme in Victoria Park, Haywards Heath. BMSAG support the withdrawal of the landowner briefs issued to our former partner concerning Haywards Heath Station Quarter and Haywards Heath Town Centre once revised community requirements have been agreed. These matters have not yet been reported to Cabinet for consideration. The BMSAG meeting due to be held on 2nd December 2010 was cancelled due to the severe weather event and will now be held on 3rd February 2010 at 2 p.m.

Individual work streams

Railway Stations

8. Solum Regeneration has now met all three Town Councils and their Director spoke at the meeting of the Haywards Heath & District Business Association meeting held on 18th November 2010. They are currently reviewing opportunities and have agreed to report back to the meeting of BMSAG on 3rd February 2011. A scheme at Burgess Hill Station has the potential of being a partnership scheme by the inclusion of land at Queens Crescent. The other two sites would not impact on Council land and schemes would be led by the private sector. The Council's role would be limited to providing assistance and promoting inward investment to support the revitalisation of these key areas. If the schemes were progressed, the Council would have its usual planning role.

Queens Walk

9. Mr C Martell addressed the BMSAG on 7th October 2010 and confirmed they had a preferred development partner, Frontier Estates. Your officers met them on 5th November 2010 and further meetings are planned. This project has potential to bring forward a significant revitalisation of Queens Walk. A discussion has been held with East Grinstead Town Council concerning community requirements arising from the scheme and reported back to BMSAG on 6th January 2011. If an agreement with Mr Martell and his development partner is not achieved, the Council will be in a position to go to the market place to test private sector interest. It is expected that further progress will be made on this scheme during 2011, which could include an agreement with Mr Martell and the preparation and submission of a planning application.

Victoria Park

10. There is interest from the private sector to bring forward a scheme at Victoria Park in Haywards Heath and BMSAG heard from a local architect at its meeting on 4th November 2010. The principle of a scheme is established by the adopted master plan and BMSAG have asked officers, in consultation with the Town Council, to prepare the community requirements arising from a scheme and establish the procurement and selection process. This project does have momentum and offers the opportunity for improvement in a key location in the town centre. Officers have

set up a small project group to take this matter forward. It is expected that further progress will be made on this scheme in 2011, including the identification of community requirements from a scheme in the park followed by the Council seeking expressions of interest through marketing the opportunity.

Haywards Heath Town Centre

11. The agents for the head leaseholder of the Orchards Shopping Centre have expressed an interest to work with the Council to improve the Orchards. There are lease issues they wish to address and they have confirmed a desire to seek enhancements to the retail offer at the Orchards. This site, therefore, could give rise to a scheme in due course. A meeting was held with them on 9th November 2010 and a further meeting is planned for 27th January 2011. Further progress is anticipated during 2011 on this scheme with the Council having a key role as landowner and operator of the car parks adjoining the Orchards.

Environmental Enhancements Hayward's Heath Town Centre

12. On 4th November, BMSAG considered ideas for improvements to the public realm. The Town Council and WSCC made contributions to the debate. There is support for improvements and a meeting of the key partners has since been held to discuss how to move forward. Progress on this will be reported to BMSAG at their meeting in February 2011.

Burgess Hill Town Centre

13. The managing agents for Market Place, following public consultation in November 2010 are in the process of preparing a planning application to extend Market Place shopping centre. This is a private sector led scheme but the Council is the freeholder of the site so will have both a property and planning role. The managing agents have agreed to attend a meeting of BMSAG to discuss the issues / opportunities for Burgess Hill Town Centre.
14. The head leaseholder of Martlets Shopping Centre has recently changed and the new company has already expressed a desire to work with the Council to explore opportunities for improving the retail offer in the town centre. This centre is in need of investment and the Council is responsible for the multi-storey car park that forms part of the centre, which is in a poor condition. It is important to maintain a constructive dialogue with the new head leaseholder to determine if they have plans to substantially improve the centre or whether the Council will have to promote a scheme for the upgrade of the centre.
15. Burgess Hill Town Council started a community consultation process in December 2010 with the intention of producing a town wide strategy. Part of the focus of their work concerns improvements to the public realm in the town centre. The Council is also working with West Sussex County Council and Burgess Hill Town Council on a scheme to enhance Queen Elizabeth Avenue

Policy Context

16. The projects have the potential to support and implement key Council Policies contained within the Economic Strategy, Local Plan Policy, the adopted Master Plans, sustainable communities strategy, corporate plan, asset management plan and the car parking strategy. Schemes will require the grant of planning permission and the Council will expect the private sector to undertake full public engagement. Those schemes which involve the Council as landowner, will require specific agreements to be put in place.

Other Options Considered

17. As projects progress, there will be key issues for Members to consider, especially around financial considerations, agreements with developers, temporary arrangements necessary to support the community and traders during the construction phase of a scheme and to ensure required community infrastructure is delivered.

Financial Implications

18. This report contains no financial implications.

Other Material Implications

19. Specific implications from individual schemes within the project will be considered in the reports relevant to those schemes.
20. The Town Centre Revitalisation information on the Council's website has been updated and is reviewed monthly.

Background Papers

None.