

Public Meeting: Flitwick Market Towns Regeneration Project

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October 2019

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THE PROJECT IN
OUTLINE – AS
APPEARS FROM
FEBRUARY 2016
BID
DOCUMENTS
FOR THE MTRP
GRANT
FUNDING

- Major highways improvement works, including the delivery of a new public space
 - Led by Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) and is at contract award stage (design and build), with works expected to commence this November
 - These works are to be funded direct by CBC
 - Visuals are on display
- The relocation of the Scouts and RBL to a new headquarters building on Station Road
- Demolition of existing headquarters buildings and laying out for a short stay shoppers car park
- Together, these deliver the bulk of the 50 per cent match funding the Council are required to provide

THE PROJECT IN
OUTLINE – AS
APPEARS FROM
FEBRUARY 2016
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GRANT
FUNDING
CONT'D

- The sale of the land at Station Road for the provision of an independent retirement living facility
 - This was judged by CBC to be an improvement to the town centre as it was, and still is, judged by CBC that there is insufficient housing stock to provide for older people in Central Bedfordshire
 - As well as providing a benefit, the sale of the land was envisaged to fund the Council's obligation to deliver the new headquarters building and the car park
- An enhanced service at Flitwick Library. This has been implemented and is ongoing
- Post 2016, it appears from the Town Council's Minutes that any surplus from the sale of the land is also intended to be used to fund the development of the proposed burial ground and country park at Maulden Road

THE PROJECT – OTHER POINTS TO NOTE

Background

- The possibility of a development scheme on Station Road has been discussed by the Town Council as far back as 2013, albeit confidentially
- The public announcement of the MTRF grant by CBC in October 2015 sees these plans being formalised
- A bid was authorised for submission by full Town Council, the Station Road project providing the 50 per cent match funding required to secure the grant
- The Project had the backing of CBC Councillors and was largely successful
- Funding Agreement entered into on 3 November 2016

THE PROJECT – OTHER POINTS TO NOTE

Planning Matters

- Planning guidance from DHCLG *Housing for Older and Disabled People* published June 2019 describes need for housing for older people as “critical”, and identifies that better choice can help them live independently for longer, feel more connected to their communities and help reduce costs to social care and health systems
- “Over 55s” is a planning term (basically age restricted general market housing, a type of housing for people aged 55 and over and the active elderly see *Housing for Older and Disabled People*)
- The need to provide appropriate housing for older people is a key priority for CBC and was certainly an aspiration of the Council in 2016

THE PROJECT – OTHER POINTS TO NOTE

Planning Matters cont'd

- It is the role of the Local Planning Authority (CBC) to take a decision on planning applications based on the adopted and emerging local plan and other material considerations
- Successive surveys of businesses and shoppers by CBC have identified the need for more short stay car parking in the town centre – the latest from August 2019 found 42 per cent of users rating car parking as a negative aspect, with improving car parking a key theme to emerge from town centre users
- The country park has the benefit of having secured section 106 Green Infrastructure funds from CBC for its initial laying out - the Council still needs to fund the laying out of the first phase of the burial ground

THE PROJECT – OTHER POINTS TO NOTE

Current leasehold arrangements

- Both the Scout and Royal British Legion lease the land their buildings are on from the Town Council on a full repairing and insuring (FRI) basis. This is the same for the Sea Cadets, Girl Guides and the Flitwick Gardeners Association
- They all pay a nominal rent, reflecting the fact they are community organisations on FRI leases
- The Scouts and Royal British Legion both sublet their buildings out to other community users (7 local groups use the Scout Hut, approx. 10 use the Royal British Legion HQ on a regular basis) and keep the money received from subletting for use against outgoings
- It is clear that the current buildings occupied by the Scouts and Royal British Legion are at the end of their useful lives, and that the Scouts have outgrown their current building

THE PROJECT – OTHER POINTS TO NOTE

Asset portfolio review

- Following the Extraordinary Meeting, a review of the Council's asset portfolio is being undertaken to ascertain the available options for raising the necessary finance for the Project and the initial laying out of the burial ground, as well as discussions with other community groups to determine if the Project is in the best interests of Flitwick as a whole (Flitwick Girl Guides also have dilapidation issues with their building)
- Seven Council owned sites are being considered, including Station Road and land adjoining the Steppingley Road allotment site (which has been allocated for housing development in the emerging local plan)
- It is anticipated that the review will be completed in the next three to four months

THE PROJECT – OTHER POINTS TO NOTE

The burial ground and other matters

- The Council are not obligated under law to provide a new burial ground although have previously resolved to do so
- The combined planning and needs assessment accompanying the Maulden Road application for the country park and burial ground indicates that based on the annual average number of burials (20 per annum), pre-purchasing of graves and remaining 47 burial spaces (as at May 2019), the existing cemetery is anticipated to be at capacity in 2 years and 4 months (around September 2021)
- Aside from this project, Central Bedfordshire continue to explore town centre improvements around the Station, including a transport interchange
- It is anticipated that the new public space will be launched by holding a French market and going forward it is hoped it will provide space for a Christmas tree and possibly for a public art installation (yet to be decided)

KEY 2019 DATES

- 16 April full FTC meeting Cllr Thompson indicates in confidential section FTC now in a position to submit application for OPP and full PP for HQ and car park
- 26 April notification of lodging of PP for the telecoms mast
- 16 May FTC letter of objection to grant of PP for telecoms mast
- 17 May applications for PP for HQ building and car park and C2 residential use submitted
- 20 May first press release issued
- June second press release issued
- 18 July CBC confirm validation of application for OPP
- 21 August CBC confirm validation of application for full PP for the HQ building and shoppers car park
- 5 September Extraordinary Meeting
- 9 September instigation of review of Council assets
- 17 September full Town Council meeting
- 20 September CBC confirm the withdrawal of the application for OPP

THE FUNDING AGREEMENT

- It is clear that there has been significant delay on the part of both parties in delivering the Project – it should have been completed by Q3 2017/18
- FTC are obligated to match fund the grant CBC are providing (which is primarily funding the town centre highways improvement works)
- FTC must deliver a development scheme or project which delivers improvements to and economic benefits for Flitwick town centre at a similar cost to the grant
- No alternative schemes appear to have been considered at the time of the bid, although the possibility of including a doctor's surgery in the HQ building had come up at one stage (although was discounted as there was no interest from the CCG)

THE FUNDING AGREEMENT CONT'D

- It is open to the Council to deliver a different scheme or project, provided it delivers the aims and objectives of the Market Town Regeneration Fund and is of equivalent value
- FTC would need to submit a written request for change to CBC for approval
- Failure to comply with the requirements in relation to match funding may result in
 - CBC commencing legal proceedings for an order of specific performance and/ or compensation to recoup the amount of the grant expended by CBC
 - Prejudice to future applications for grant funding based development opportunities

OWNERSHIP OF STATION ROAD, ITS PREVIOUS AND CURRENT USE

- The Council's ownership of the land at Station Road is beyond doubt – it was registered at HM Land Registry with effect from 29 June 2018 under title number BD321782
- The original conveyance of it took place on 23 May 1949 from the PRs of Robert Adolphus Lyall to Flitwick Parish Council and was for a capital sum reflecting its use at that time
- The title is clear with the exception of the easements granted under the lease for the current telecoms mast - there are no restrictive covenants that prevent the Council from disposing of the land to a potential developer for any alternative use
- Historically used as allotment land and therefore benefited from statutory protection under the Allotment Acts 1908 – 1950
- The Secretary of State's consent to a release of the land for the Project has though been obtained and is dated 7 November 2017
- The suggestion that the land is common land or a village green can not be substantiated – it was last used for allotments in 2002 and need at least twenty years continuous use

FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PROPOSED HQ BUILDING

- Flitwick Branch of the Royal British Legion have stated that they are not in a position to provide any financial contribution - they would need to apply to the national organisation
- Flitwick branch of the Scouts have been actively fund raising – they have raised a significant contribution which they wish to use for fit out works
- Nothing to stop the Council requesting a greater contribution to the new HQ building from either of them
- The Council not currently providing any direct financial assistance to any community organisation
- The rent currently paid by all community organisations is minimal, at a non- commercial (i.e. discounted) rate

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