



EAST  
CAMBRIDGESHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance & Assets Committee facilitated via the Zoom Video Conferencing System at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely on Thursday, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2020, at 4.31pm.

### **PRESENT**

Cllr David Brown (Chairman)  
Cllr David Ambrose Smith  
Cllr Ian Bovingdon  
Cllr Charlotte Cane  
Cllr Simon Harries  
Cllr Bill Hunt  
Cllr Alan Sharp  
Cllr John Trapp  
Cllr Alison Whelan

### **OFFICERS**

Emma Grima – Director Commercial  
Sally Bonnett – Infrastructure & Strategy Manager  
Maggie Camp – Legal Services Manager  
Ian Smith – Finance Manager  
Janis Murfet – Democratic Services Officer (Committees)

### **IN ATTENDANCE**

Rachel Ashley-Caunt – Head of Internal Audit  
Jacob McHugh – Audit Manager, External Audit, Ernst &  
Young  
Suresh Patel – Associate Partner, External Audit, Ernst &  
Young

## **6. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

Councillor Charles Warner, Chairman of Soham Town Council, submitted the following representation, which was read out on his behalf by the Director Commercial:

‘A Market town Plan for Soham

*The report in general is most welcome as a general document but has many short comings.*

*In the interest of all concerned and to satisfy the democratic process it should have been shown at draft stage to Soham Town Council so that those*

*inaccurate assumptions could have been corrected which would have resulted in a more robust document.*

*According to the report it was commissioned to help the market towns climb out of Lockdown, meaning the report was generated in the last 12 weeks and the reason the town council was not informed or consulted on its contents - however, I refute this as it could have been quite easy for this document to come forward under normal due process. What happened to Localism?*

*From reading the contents it would appear the report has been compiled from desktop research and remains doubtful whether anyone involved in writing it has ever had any involvement with the local community as many of the ideas have been raised in the past and indeed, been dismissed for valid logistic and practical, notwithstanding financial reasons.*

*I, as Chairman have no dispute with the statistics provided in the report but believe that some of the forecasts or predictions included are, to say the least, unrealistic to the point of being far-fetched. Take for example the train usage in Ely. I am sure the figures for the use of Ely station are accurate but as we are told there will be only one train every two hours in each direction, stopping at Soham station, it seems unlikely that the use of trains at Soham will escalate to the level as suggested.*

*The report clearly identifies that Soham has more young and older people than the surrounding district. It doesn't make clear that many of the older people have moved to Soham to occupy places already in place to cater specifically for older people with another care home in the pipeline.*

*Much of the report focusses on connectivity within the town majoring on an efficient walking and cycle routes so people can easily access the town centre without the use of a car. This is fine so long as you are able to walk or cycle and carry shopping but fails to recognise that with such developments as the Eastern Gateway it will be beyond the ability of older people to cover this distance without the use of a car. It should be noted that the town council continues to engage with the Developers of the Eastern Gateway who have to date resisted not only High St access for this proposed 500 houses but also no provision for communal car parking to enable foot traffic to the High St-both fundamental in enabling footfall to the High St and increasing potential GVA for which this report was commissioned.*

*The same applies to the access to the new rail station. The report states that Stagecoach will be approached to make sure that buses connect with the trains stopping at the station. A really good idea! But how are the buses to access the station. The roads around the station are unsuitable with poor access to the high street. Clarification is also needed as to the location of the land set aside for a business park close to the station.*

*The report identifies Soham as a possible Agritek hotspot. We already have an internationally renowned vegetable producer, also a well-known grower of trees who are the largest local employers. Have these two very important stakeholders been consulted at any time on their future needs as to research and the impact of Brexit on their businesses and employment? The report does make mention of the existing Innovation Hub which is well outside the town whilst this is appreciated it is not exactly a big employer as there are rarely more than 10 cars in the carpark.*

*Opening up the Lode for more river traffic to encourage tourism has been raised before. However, it seems that the only way to do this would be to widen the Lode from where it joins the main river at Barway. This is practically and financially a huge mountain to climb because this part of the Lode is 'lined' to keep the water in. If the lining is disturbed the water will seep away and with low bridges across the Lode between Barway and Soham would only allow small river craft up to Soham. A marina is a great idea but is neither practical or financially viable. The report purports to help the town overcome the Coronavirus lockdown, Since the majority of the shops in the town centre are either eateries or hairdressers/barbers, these have been shut since late March and the town centre has been dead. The Coop, Asda and the Post office have remained open. Now the eateries are all providing take away meals to order. The very few independent shops now have the opportunity to reopen but as far as we know there has been little or no help offered to any businesses in the town.*

*One of the biggest problems for our High Street is the lack of parking. There is a small car park opposite the Fountain Inn and along Clay Street but these are totally inadequate for the numbers of cars which want to access the town centre. The town really needs a suitable place close to the centre to create a car park and then to make the main street a traffic free zone, diverting the through traffic down a one-way system along Clay Street or Fountain Lane and Paddock Street. This aspect is woefully lacking in this high level document.*

*The report highlights the need for more footfall in the high street and suggests this will be met by building more housing. Soham is already a commuter town as illustrated in the report with the majority of consumer economic activity and spend taking place out of town. Much more consideration must be given to attracting more sustainable high-quality jobs to the local area along with tourism.*

*The report correctly identifies that the town's sports facilities are in need of updating but my question is do we need more sports fields? It remains a pity that the Village College facilities both for sports fields and for the performing arts are not more available to the community whilst the privately owned common land is being neglected, overused and degraded.*

*The report is based on facts, figures and statistics and for that reason it is an excellent report providing a lot of important information for Soham. However, many of its suggestions to improve Soham's offer while also excellent ideas, are really just aspirational which will require not only the will, drive and energy to bring them about but the cooperation of many businesses, people and government departments and substantial funding.'*

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked Councillor Warner for his contribution. The Director Commercial added her thanks and reminded Members to consider Councillor Warner's comments when discussing the Soham Masterplan later in the agenda. She reiterated that Soham Town Council would have the opportunity, through the implementation plan, to get their comments across .

7. **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

No apologies were offered and no substitutions were made.

8. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

9. **MINUTES**

Further to Minute No. 1 (Election of Chairman, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2020), it was noted that despite Councillor David Brown being the only nominee, the Minute incorrectly showed Councillor David Ambrose Smith as having been elected as Chairman of the Finance & Assets Committee. Councillor Brown requested that this error be corrected. Whereupon,

It was resolved:

That subject to the agreed amendment, the Minutes of the meetings held on 6<sup>th</sup> February and 21<sup>st</sup> May 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

10. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman made the following announcements:

- He wished to start by thanking all officers of the Council for all they had done during the Covid-19 pandemic. Officers had all risen to the challenges to keep the work of the Council operating effectively. On behalf of the Committee, he asked that his thanks and congratulations be passed on;
- The consultation period for the Bus/Walk/Cycleway has now ended. Officers are working their way through the consultation responses. An update will come to Committee in July 2020;
- Members may have expected to see a report on Finance for both the Council and ECTC. There will be a full report going to Council in July. I notice there is nothing in the Forward Plan relating to ECTC and I ask that the Director Commercial reviews this to include the items that this Committee has requested;
- For the Council, at this time of year we would normally get a report following close down. Due to Covid-19 this has been delayed a month so this will be at the July meeting;

- Members may have also expected to see reports about 2 SPD's, Service Delivery Plans, Debt Write Offs, the Equality & Diversity policy, the Risk Register, Health and Safety Reporting, and Joiners and Leavers at this committee. The SPDs for adoption were always scheduled to come in July. In light of COVID the Service Delivery Plans that were scheduled for March need to be reviewed to reflect changes and priorities during COVID-19. Members received an update at May Council on the current status of each service. Debt Write-offs, Joiners and Leavers, and the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion draft policy for consultation will come to the July meeting. The Risk Register, SPDs for consultation and Health and Safety Reporting will come to the September meeting;
- Members can raise other items for future meetings at Item 16 – Forward Agenda Plan.

#### 11. **EXTERNAL AUDIT – ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER 2018/19**

Suresh Patel, Associate Partner, Ernst & Young, the Council's External Auditors, presented the Annual Audit Letter and introduced his colleague Jacob McHugh, the Council's Audit Manager for this year.

Mr Patel stated that both papers were dated February and March and were meant to have come to the March Committee meeting which was subsequently cancelled. As Members were aware, the 2018/19 Letter had been discussed in great detail and was signed off after the February meeting. He did not intend talking through the Letter, but was happy to take any questions.

A Member commented that she did not think it great that the Committee was receiving this Letter which was dated 13<sup>th</sup> February, nearly a full year after the year which was being audited. The next agenda item would not be reported until November 2020 and her point was that surely part of the value of an audit report was that it was timely.

Mr Patel said he took her point but there was not much he could add. The reasons had been discussed and the 2019/20 dates had been moved by DCLG because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Another Member made reference to the fee of £2,005 for a correspondence matter. He believed it would have been courteous to share the open letter with Members so they could question it and see the answers given.

There being no further comments, the Chairman said he welcomed the Letter being positive.

It was resolved:

That the Annual Audit Letter 2018/19 be received and noted.

## 12. **EXTERNAL AUDIT – OUTLINE AUDIT PLAN 2019/20**

The Committee received the External Audit Plan for 2019/20. Suresh Patel, for the Council's External Auditors, Ernst and Young, explained that the Plan had been drafted in early March and he would give an update regarding the impact of the Covid outbreak.

With regard to a Member's comment about the timing of the report, in the light of Covid, DCLG had changed the reporting dates for local authorities. They now had until the end of August to publish their draft accounts and until the end of November to publish the audited accounts.

A timetable had been agreed and they were working to the end of June which was a testament to the abilities of the Finance team to work effectively. Remote working seemed to be working quite well. There had been successful audits although some things were slower. Mr Patel said he was quite impressed with how the Finance teams were coping. A phasing approach would be taken to audit fieldwork, but all audit opinions would be given at the same time, by the end of November. It would ensure that audits were done effectively and in time.

He suggested that there would be more emphasis on going concerns in the audit. He then handed over to Mr McHugh, who made the following points:

- Page 5 – misstatements due to fraud or error were recognised but there was no change in the risk or focus. With regard to property, plant and equipment (PPE) valuations, as of March would be reviewed, this was due to the size of the portfolio, because of the impact of Covid, there was a large level of uncertainty;
- Page 6 – The Authority's current pension fund deficit was an area of focus and because of the increased uncertainty, it would be monitored. A new area of focus was the implementation of new auditing and accounting standards. ECSS was largely unaffected but ECTC had been more affected by Covid due to the halt of operations. There was additional work to be done but the risks had already been identified.

Mr Patel then continued, saying that a new accounting standard had come into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 in respect of leases. No new significant risks had been identified but the Authority would be required to make certain disclosures in respect of its preparations for implementation within the 2019/20 statements.

With regard to Value for Money, no new significant risks had been identified on the basis that the Authority had recently set a budget and updated medium term financial strategy showing fully funded revenue budgets for 2020/21 and 2021/22. The assessment of risks would be updated throughout the audit and Members would be advised if any additional risks were identified. A number of recommendations had been made in connection with the prior year, and these were set out on page 17 of the Audit Plan.

Members' attention was drawn to page 36 of the document, which set out the planned fee for 2019/20 and the final fee for 2018/19.

Page 37 gave a summary of the key factors relating to fees. It was noted that the PSAA would determine the fees, but it was not believed that the existing scale provided a clear link with both the Authority's risk and complexity; an increase in to the fee scale would therefore be proposed. The Chairman said he had received an email from the PSAA in which they stated that they were looking at things on a national level to see how fee levels might be mitigated.

The Finance Manager said that the fee for 2019/20 was just over £50k and the Authority had paid just over £47k in 2018/19. Taking this in context, it was not a significant increase.

There being no further comments, the Chairman thanked Messrs Patel and McHugh for their contribution to the meeting, and

It was resolved:

That the External Audit Outline Plan be received and noted.

### 13. **INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2020/21**

The Committee considered a report (reference V18, previously circulated) which presented the draft Internal Audit Plan for 2020/21 and the Internal Audit Charter for review and formal approval.

Rachel Ashley-Caunt, Head of Internal Audit, stated that the Plan had been due to come to Committee in March but that meeting had been cancelled due to the Covid pandemic.

Members were reminded that LGSS Internal Audit was required to provide 200 days of audit and assurance work in 2020/21. A two year Plan had been prepared to illustrate how assurance could be provided in the longer term and it was last reviewed in March 2019.

The proposed amendments to the 2020/21 Audit Plan were shown in Table 1 on page 4 of Appendix 1. Pages 6 – 8 detailed the draft Internal Audit plan for 2020/21 and 2021/22.

Ms Ashley-Caunt said that as the Plan had been prepared prior to the Covid pandemic, the risk environment would have to be reviewed and changed. Perhaps a more flexible approach could be taken, but it would come back to Committee for a further review. She also informed Members that the draft Annual Governance Statement would come to Committee in July and the Chairman added that the Risk Register would come to September's meeting.

A Member said that having looking at the time allocated to the Local Authority's trading companies, he proposed that further time should be allocated in 2021/22. Ms Ashley-Caunt replied that it was proposed to spend 10 days on this in 2020/21. It had not been included for 2021/22, but as it was a key area the

work undertaken in 2020/21 might inform audit planning going forward and would be up for review.

Another Member asked what work had been done in the year to date. She proposed that time be spent on governance rather than the inter-company accounts and said that she would have expected Internal Audit to carry out some work this year to ensure proper processes were in place and being followed. She continued, observing that Brexit and the Covid pandemic were not mentioned in the Plan and said she would have expected to see them in there.

The Member then turned to the Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP), noting that there had been work on whether customer needs were being met in respect of reducing the risk of fraud. She considered that the delivery of customer service should be reviewed, as the payment of business grants was often slow. The Chairman responded by saying that Councillor David Ambrose Smith was the Council's representative on the ARP Board; he was aware of the risks and was following up on them.

Ms Ashley-Caunt provided the following responses to the questions posed:

- The Annual Governance Statement had been drafted but she recognised that it must be up to date when produced;
- Advice was being given regarding business grants taking into account intelligence in respect of fraud. Work on the financial systems testing would be reported at the next meeting;
- With regard to Brexit and Covid, her report had been produced pre-Covid. Brexit was a cross cutting risk and they had to be mindful of the risks;
- Members should highlight any areas they wanted to be included in the audit;
- Fraud would be considered in every report;
- She asked that Members inform her of any areas they wanted for a dedicated audit;
- The trading company inter-company accounts would be included in the risk work;
- In connection with the comments regarding the ARP, some of the audit work focussed on performance standards. Because of the third party nature of their relationship, there was some support from the ARP's auditors and she would take this back and maybe look to widen the scope.

A Member remarked that robust plans should be in place for Brexit and Ms Ashley-Caunt replied that she would discuss this with management. The controls would be reviewed as part of the process.



Another Member requested that a realistic amount of time be set aside, over the next couple of meetings, to thoroughly review the Risk Register. He felt it would be helpful to ensure enough time to carry out a line by line review and Members to have input. This could improve confidence and joint working.

Ms Ashley-Caunt said the full Register did come to Committee and she agreed that it would be useful to revisit the framework as it needed a full review. She had already been in touch with other Risk Management groups and was getting the ball rolling to consider impacts. Registers were in place specific to Covid and there was joined up risk management; it was a case of looking at the 'new normal' of risks.

The Chairman informed Members that a report would be coming to Committee in September and he asked the Finance Manager to include details of who would be sitting on the Risk Management Working Party and the scope of its work.

A further Member noted that there were no days in the Plan for procurement compliance. He made the point that fraud or error could creep in and therefore this should be kept on the radar. Ms Ashley-Caunt fully agreed with him, saying that there used to be an audit on an annual basis, but it was now dealt with in a more specific way. Based on the outcome of this year's audit she would take a view regarding testing again next year but she would like to see an audit carried out on a regular basis.

It was resolved:

- 1) To approve the proposed Internal Audit Plan for 2020/21 and the Internal Audit Charter;
- 2) To approve the delegation of authority to the Council's S151 Officer to approve in year amendments to the Audit Plan between Committee meetings, this in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee.

#### 14. **COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY FUNDING REQUEST**

The Committee received a report (reference V19, previously circulated) from which Members were asked to consider the allocation of £150, 000 to the A142/Witchford Roundabout Project.

The Infrastructure & Strategy Manager reminded Members of the background to the request, saying that improvements at the roundabout would unlock maximum benefits, including further growth on the Lancaster Way Business Park.

Matched funding had been secured from the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority and there were sufficient funds in ECDC's CIL account to meet the request for funding.

Consultation would take place over the summer, allowing local residents and stakeholders to comment.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Bailey, County Council Member for Ely South, addressed the Committee and made the following points:

- She felt there had been quite a lot of misinformation and misunderstanding about the project, and so she wished to explain the background and wider picture;
- This was part of a wider scheme to upgrade the BP and Lancaster Way roundabouts and she had worked on it for over four years;
- The BP roundabout was one of the busiest and part of the strategic road network. The improvements were critical because there had been a 56% increase in traffic, equating to 26,000 vehicles each day;
- The route was on 'purple' capacity at peak times;
- It had been hard to get the funding, but the project was being funded by Grovemere, the old Local Enterprise Company and the Combined Authority;
- Lancaster Way Business Park was on the ECDC 123 List and Grovemere had a S106 Obligation to improve the BP roundabout. This was now fully funded and work would commence in July;
- The Business Park would expand bringing with it some 3,000 jobs, but without the upgrade there would be very little improvement in the flow of traffic;
- The benefit cost ratio of the scheme was 80 and anyone who understood such things would appreciate how important this was;
- It would be important to set some limits because this project was only an interim solution. There had been some disingenuous behaviour at the County Council but exhaustive efforts had been made during the design stages to find a solution for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders;
- The County Council Committee had been given a full briefing and had concluded that a dedicated separate crossing was required. There was a firm commitment to provide this as part of the A10 Upgrade Project;
- The project was backed by Government funding and would include Active Travel;
- There would be no benefits without changes to the BP roundabout;
- She thanked everyone who had backed this project, especially Councillors Lewis Herbert (Leader of Cambridge City Council) and

Bridget Smith (Leader of South Cambridgeshire District Council), and urged Members to support the officer's recommendation.

Councillor Bailey then responded to comments and questions from the Committee. She confirmed that this request for funding was the final 'piece of the jigsaw' and then both schemes could go ahead. The BP roundabout was already fully funded and the work would be carried out July – December 2020; Lancaster Way would commence in the New Year. She confirmed that Councillor Bridget Smith supported the scheme

A Member said she found it difficult to comment. Although the project had been put on the CIL List some time ago, she felt there was an urgent need for a strategic transport review. The whole matter should be considered in a strategic way as to how they were going to manage people moving around the District, taking into account walking, cycling and horse riding. She asked the Chairman to write to the Combined Authority to ask for a full report with plans, timetables and costs, as she wanted more than aspirations.

The Chairman replied that the next agenda item was the Covid-19 Working Party, and Council had asked it to look at many of the issues she had raised. He was sure that the Infrastructure & Strategy Manager had taken on board her comments.

Another Member said he had one basic concern regarding multiple policies that did not join up: climate emergency, emissions targets, and aspirations for active travel. At grass roots level, the policies sometimes seemed to conflict, but a way had to be found to bring them together without being so 'tribal'. He said that if he was working in his capacity as a management consultant, he would want to know the specifics of a scheme, to see the justification. He thought there should be a more pragmatic approach towards targets and figures as this would be good for public confidence.

A Member enquired about the number of people currently working at the Business Park and asked how it was known that 3,000 people would be employed there or was this just an aspiration. The Chairman advised that it was not possible to give a response at this meeting, but Members would be provided with the information.

A Member interjected to say that between 1,500 and 2,000 people were currently employed at the Business Park and while these were uncertain times he knew that the scheme would lead to extra employment. There were a number of ways in which people could get to Lancaster Way and since last year there had been a regular hourly bus service going in and out and there was even a special season ticket permitting people to use public transport to come to work.

At this point, the Chairman invited Councillor Bailey to make further comment. She explained that as Leader of the Council, she sat on the Enterprise Zone Board, and the figures were based on the planning application. There was no doubt that the Business Park was very successful and significant investment had been made into it. However, it was not legally permitted to expand until the BP roundabout was delivered and there were new businesses waiting to come

onto the Park. The hourly bus service was very good and reliable, and the money would be there for the next 10 years.

It was resolved:

To approve the expenditure of £150,000 to the A142/Witchford Roundabout Project.

## 15. **COVID-19 WORKING PARTY**

The Committee considered a report (reference V20, previously circulated) from which Members were asked to establish a COVID-19 Member Working Party to work with businesses, community groups and other authorities from parishes through to central government to help drive an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable recovery for East Cambs.

The Director Commercial reminded Members that following a motion at Annual Council on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2020, it was resolved to set up the Working Party. The Terms of Reference were set out in Appendix 1 to the report, and it was proposed that membership should comprise 6 elected Members: 3 Conservatives, 2 Liberal Democrats, and 1 Independent. The Chairman would be an elected Member from the Conservative Group.

Members welcomed the proposal, saying that it would be a really good opportunity to work together and they expressed the hope that the first meeting would be arranged as soon as possible.

It was proposed that Councillors Bovingdon, Every and Webber (Conservative Group) and Councillors Cane and Downey (Liberal Democrats) should sit on the Group; the Independent Member would be confirmed in due course. Whereupon,

It was resolved:

- 1) That the following Members be appointed to the COVID-19 Working Party:  
Conservative  
Councillors Ian Bovingdon, Lis Every & Jo Webber;  
  
Liberal Democrat:  
Councillors Charlotte Cane & Matthew Downey;  
  
Independent:  
To be advised.
- 2) That the draft Terms of Reference, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

## 16. **ELY AND SOHAM MASTERPLANS**

The Committee considered a report (reference V21, previously circulated) from which Members were asked to approve the draft Ely and Soham Masterplan documents for submission to the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) for adoption.

The Infrastructure & Strategy Manager stated that the Combined Authority had an ambition to double the Gross Value Added (GVA) of market towns across the whole Combined Authority area. £50k had been set aside per market town to work up the plans that would set out some high level asks to facilitate this.

Whilst they had been labelled 'masterplans' by the CPCA, they were not masterplans in the traditional sense and did not seek to replace, override or contradict what was in the adopted Local Plan. They should be considered as a first step to unlocking funding that would be available through the Combined Authority.

The draft masterplans would act as a prospectus for Ely and Soham to secure both support and funding for the schemes identified both within the masterplan and the implantation plan. The Combined Authority had allocated a total of £10 million to support delivery and implementation of the approved Market Town Masterplans, excluding St Neots.

Both masterplans had been written purposely broad to enable the Council to unlock the funding needed to take forward the next stage of work. The Council would engage and consult with all relevant stakeholders, including the City of Ely and Soham Town Council, during the implementation phase.

There were themes developed for each masterplan, and each was accompanied by an implementation plan; it was in the implementation phase that consultation would become necessary.

If the Committee was minded to approve the documents for submission to the Combined Authority, they would be considered for approval and if approved by the CPCA Board, this Council could then make bids to unlock the funds needed to progress to the next stage.

The Infrastructure & Strategy Manager concluded by reiterating that this should be seen as the beginning of the journey, not the end.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Lis Every, a Ward Member for Ely East and a County Council Member for Ely North, addressed the Committee and made the following points:

- This was a high level strategic plan that would unlock the opportunity to bid for a share of £13 million;
- Ely and Soham would be going to the CPCA Board in July, and if successful, the funds would be spent by March 2022;

- It was important to remember that this was the first stage in a process that targeted growth and regeneration;
- It could attract more funding from Government and the private sector;
- It could bring more jobs and growth and boost the regional economy, but timing was key;
- The three areas of the Station Gateway, City centre and connectivity had long been discussed, and everyone wanted Ely to thrive;
- The Covid pandemic had shown that people wanted to shop locally;
- The next stage would be vital, based on local engagement and a wide consultation process;
- This was a shared vision, and an opportunity to come together and work in a positive, collaborative way;
- Established partnerships were still in place and the masterplan documents would provide the framework;
- She had lived in Ely for 45 years, her children were educated here and she had had a business here. She had engaged with local people;
- She thanked officers for their work on the initial plans to unlock funds and said she was sure people would want to work with them.

During the course of discussion, a number of points of view were expressed.

One Member questioned why the documents were called masterplans when they were not, and he was advised that the Combined Authority had said that the term was to be used. The Member continued, saying that nobody was going to vote against something that would bring investment, but there was absolutely nothing that gave him comfort apart from more discussions. The plans contained assumptions and he felt that there should have been a great deal more due diligence. He would rather the approach was less prescriptive and had more open discussion. He had seen this approach before and asked Members to take a vow that as they worked together, to make sure they cast the net broadly and went back to first principles.

He continued, saying that process was everything and would define outcomes. His concern was that here was a very messy process. There was money to be spent, but Members had taken no strategic decisions and this proposal had been imposed on them. It was an amateurish way of doing things and he wished his concerns about the process to be very clearly noted.

Another Member thought it regrettable that the City and Town Councils had not been consulted on the documents and she hoped that efforts would be

made to address this. She felt it would have been better to ask them first and she hoped that this would not come back to haunt the Council. Proper Equality and Carbon Impact Assessments needed to be taken into consideration; there had been no discussion about how to address the pockets of deprivation in Ely and education included private schools which were not available to most.

She acknowledged that the plans had to be accepted, but felt that an opportunity had been missed. It should be ensured that there should be a real benefit to the community before any money was spent.

The Infrastructure & Strategy Manager assured Members that Equality and Carbon Assessments would be carried out during the implementation stage.

A further Member considered the plans to have been the result of an armchair exercise. The opportunities for Ely Railway Station were very limited, as car parking spaces were full by early morning and people coming to shop in Tesco would travel by car; Central Ely was constrained by a lack of land.

In response to a number of questions, the Director Commercial replied that the documents would be submitted to the CPCA Board for approval. There would be meaningful consultation during the implementation phase and the outcome could be £1 million for each market town. Members wished to know whether the priorities were set in stone or could be changed, and if the financial aspects could be debated. The Director Commercial said that studies (and projects) would be commissioned; the Council was about delivering something tangible and of meaningful benefit to the area.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Dan Schumann, a Ward Member for Soham South addressed the Committee regarding the Soham document and he made the following comments:

- He was very excited by the plan for Soham and believed it to have some good content;
- At last there was a focus on investment in the market towns. It had been a struggle, but the plan now made a case for Soham;
- The term 'Masterplan' was questionable and the value of external views should not be forgotten;
- When working with funders, it had to be respected that they would want to fund what they wanted. To get the best out of that focus, remember the funder and seize the day;
- He believed that consultation would come, but at the right time;
- In the past, in Soham, things got lost in the process. However, this would be a measured process and provide hooks on which could be hung what the town decided it needed;

- It would give the hooks needed to bring investment to the town. It would 'have teeth' and be meaningful;
- He heard what colleagues were saying, and maybe this was not a traditional route, but they should seize the day;
- There was first a need to satisfy the funder of the case for investment and then carry out consultation;
- He did not believe there was anything within the document that said they could not do something.

The other Ward Member for Soham South said he had been in two minds when he first saw the document, but soon realised this was the first time that Soham would get some real money. Some of the items would be difficult to reach, but the process could be started and there was a need to be strongly vocal to get the money and get things moving.

A Member said she liked Councillor Schumann's comment that the plans would provide a hook on which to hang whatever the town decided it needed, and if this was the case, she was really pleased with that statement. The Combined Authority had decided to work in partnership with us and it had to be ensured that the money was well spent and delivered what was wanted. The Council had to make sure that Mayor Palmer listened to what was being said.

A Member, picking up on the point that the funder could spend the money on what it wanted, expressed concern that this was a top down process. It was essentially a democratic process and he would like to see less top down pressure, as it should come from the will of the people.

Another Member reminded the Committee that the Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough had been democratically elected; he had worked towards a station for Soham and he believed that Soham had a golden future.

A further Member declared his support for the schemes and asked the Infrastructure & Strategy Manager if she could tell Members about the process once the documents had been submitted to the Combined Authority. She said that the Combined Authority would be putting forward a prospectus, and the Director Commercial interjected to say that she would provide Members with an update after the meeting.

It was resolved:

- 1) That the draft Ely Masterplan, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be approved for submission to the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority for adoption;
- 2) That the draft Soham Masterplan, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report, be approved for submission to the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority for adoption;



- 3) That authority be delegated to the Infrastructure & Strategy Manager, in consultation with the Chairman of the Finance & Assets Committee, to make minor amendments to the Ely and Soham Masterplans.

*There followed a comfort break between 6.54pm and 7.05pm.*

17. **ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE ON THE GROUNDS OF URGENCY**

The Committee received a report (reference V22, previously circulated) which set out details of two actions taken by the Chief Executive on the grounds of urgency.

The first related to Business Rate Reliefs, and the second to Council Tax Hardships Relief.

With regard to the latter, a Member asked how much had been spent and had the Council give any other reliefs. The Chairman asked the Finance Manager to respond and the Committee was advised that the hardship money amounted to just over £400k. Of this, just over half had been allocated but because of the Covid pandemic, the balance was being held back in anticipation of further requests in the next six months.

The Member asked if it would be possible to have an update at meetings on how much had been spent. It would allow the Committee at some point in the year to review what money was left and how it should be used.

The Chairman concluded by saying that if Members were aware of anyone expressing concerns about paying their Council tax, to advise them to speak to the ARP.

There being no further comments or questions,

It was resolved:

That the reports be noted.

18. **ANNUAL REPORTS OF REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES**

The Committee received a report (reference V23, previously circulated) from which Members were asked to receive the Annual Reports from appointed Council representatives on the activities and manner in which funding was spent by the outside bodies within the responsibility of the Finance & assets Committee.

The Democratic Services Officer said that although representatives were appointed for a period of up to four years, a report was brought to Committee

each year so that Members could review the representatives' submitted reports. She had not been advised of any representatives wishing to resign and there remained a number of vacancies on the Cawdle Fen Internal Drainage Board (IDB).

She asked Members to note that Councillor Gareth Wilson had submitted a report in respect of Haddenham Level IDB, but it had not been included as it had not reached her until after the agenda had gone to print.

The Chairman noted that comments regarding accessibility had been made in connection with the IDB meetings, and he asked the Democratic Services Officer to ensure that the Clerk to the Drainage Boards was made aware of this. He also thought that the Members serving on IDB's should raise the matter when attending Board meetings.

A Member queried how the matter was supposed to be raised when one could not actually get to that meeting. The Chairman said he assumed that Members would email their apologies, and they could therefore ask Mrs Heading to put it on the agenda.

The Member responded, saying that it was a serious issue and showed that there were serious problems. The Council had a single equality scheme in which it was supposed to work with partners. She therefore proposed that the Council be instructed to deal with those partners and ask them to provide their version of an equality scheme that was suitable for use by the Council and mirrored what was going on. She asked that officers progress this with external bodies so as to ensure that access was no longer an issue. The Chairman said he would ask the Director Commercial to write to them to this effect.

Another Member requested that the responses from the outside bodies be brought to the next meeting of Committee so that Members could be assured that access issues had been sorted and meetings would be accessible to all. The Chairman replied that he could not guarantee to have a reply by the July meeting, but they would come to Committee as soon as was possible.

With regard to the vacancies on the Cawdle Fen IDB, a Member volunteered, and was duly appointed to serve as a representative on the Board.

It was resolved

- 1) That the Annual Reports from appointed Council representatives on the activities and manner in which funding is spent by the outside bodies within the responsibility of the Finance & Assets Committee, be noted;
- 2) That Councillor Simon Harries be appointed to serve as an ECDC representative on the Cawdle Fen Internal Drainage Board.

## 19. **ASSETS UPDATE**

The Committee received a report (reference V24, previously circulated) which provided Members with an update on Council owned assets.

The Director Commercial advised Members that the City of Ely Council had carried out a survey on the Maltings Cottage under the instruction of the District Council. The Open Spaces & Facilities Manager was now working with the City Council to address the short, medium and long term issues arising from the survey.

With regard to 70 Market Street, Ely, the Director Commercial corrected an error in paragraph 3.3 of her report saying that it should refer to *Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire (CARC)*. The organisation was moving out of the premises this week after which a valuation would be carried out with a view to advertising the premises on the open market.

A Member said she wished to comment on the Mepal Outdoor Centre, which was not included in the report. She acknowledged the difficulties that had arisen with the Centre, but felt that the time had now come for decisions to be taken about going forward. It was not good that the Centre was 'sitting in limbo' and she duly requested that a full report be brought to Committee detailing the state of the Centre, the structural issues and also ideas about the possibilities to address them.

The Director Commercial responded, saying that surveys were being undertaken to ascertain the issues and once they had been received, they would hopefully inform an option appraisal. She hoped Members would appreciate that over the last few months her work and priorities had been focussed on Covid-19. Because of this she could not commit to bringing a report to the July meeting, but she did understand the urgency.

Another Member reiterated that the Outdoor Centre was a cause for concern and he was of the view that with it being one of the larger Council assets, it could have implications for the audit going forward. It would be good to have a report before the audit work was completed and the problems were not being underestimated.

Turning to 70 Market Street, he continued, saying he was glad to hear that the premises would be going out to the open market with no commitment to any particular body. It was to be hoped that for the reputation of the Council, the building would find a good tenant.

A further Member said that from her perspective as a City of Ely Councillor, the City Council was now facing remarkably difficult times because of the impact of Covid on its operations. Few of the City Councillors had been involved with the Maltings Cottage and she wondered if there were any circumstances in which the District Council would take back the lease. The Chairman replied that a report would come to the next meeting.

The Member who had spoken of the Mepal Outdoor Centre expressed concern regarding the response she had received. She understood the significant pressures on staff, but this was a major asset of the District Council. It was costing ECDC month by month and presumably becoming less fit for purpose, thereby reducing the value of the asset. The Centre should be a high priority and the September Committee meeting was a long way off. She felt it

appeared it was being said there were not sufficient staff in the District Council to manage assets properly if a report could not be brought in September.

The Director Commercial replied that she had said she did not have capacity in the immediate future to bring a report to July's meeting, as it was only weeks away. However, she would discuss the matter with officers and the Chairman.

It was resolved:

That the update on Council owned assets be noted.

20. **EAST CAMBS BUS SERVICES REVIEW WORKING PARTY MINUTES.**

The Committee received the Minutes of the meeting of the East Cambs Bus Services Review Working Party held on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

The Chairman of the Working Party informed Members that the Infrastructure & Strategy Manager was working through the consultation responses and then the Working Party would reconvene to discuss outcomes.

A Member asked if there were Minutes for the meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2019; the Democratic Services Officer said there were draft Minutes and once they had been approved by the Working Party, they would come to the Finance & Assets Committee. Whereupon,

It was resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the East Cambs Bus Services Review Working Party held on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2019 be noted.

21. **FORWARD AGENDA PLAN**

The Committee received the Forward Agenda Plan and the Chairman reiterated that he had already referred to quite a few additions in his announcements. The Democratic Services Officer said that she had already started noting amendments to the Plan and would discuss them with officers.

A Member requested that the following be added:

- East Cambs Trading Company;
- The Medium Term Financial Strategy, as some of the assumptions had changed;
- The Committee's finances should come on a regular basis;
- A report on the pressures on staff, in the light of the Covid outbreak.

She also highlighted the huge number of items listed for the meeting in July and said that with Council falling in the same period, she believed it would be too much.

The Finance Manager commented that the Management Accounts were due to come to the July meeting, but he would discuss sending them to a later date.

Another Member agreed that the Committee meetings were very long, and he suggested a way forward might be to bring the time forward and start the meetings earlier. The response was made that moving forward the timing of the meetings might not work for those Members who still worked.

The Chairman said he would discuss the matter with officers.

It was resolved:

That the Forward Agenda Plan be noted.

22. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PRESS**

It was resolved:

That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the remaining items because it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information of Categories 1, 2 & 3 of Part I Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

23. **EXEMPT MINUTES**

The Committee received the Exempt Minutes of the meeting of the Finance & Assets Committee held on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2020.

It was resolved:

That the Exempt Minutes of the meeting of the Finance & Assets Committee held on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The meeting closed at 7.34pm.