



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

10 June 2021

7.00 pm - 9.18 pm

Council Chamber - Ebley Mill, Stroud

Minutes

Membership

Councillor Doina Cornell (Chair)

Councillor Chris Brine
Councillor Gordon Craig
Councillor Stephen Davies
Councillor Nicholas Housden*
Councillor Nick Hurst
Councillor Martin Percy

*= Absent

Councillor Catherine Braun (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Keith Pearson
Councillor Steve Robinson
Councillor Mattie Ross
Councillor Ken Tucker
Councillor Chloe Turner

Officers in Attendance

Chief Executive
Strategic Director of Place
Strategic Director of Resources
Monitoring Officer

Head of Property Services
New Homes and Regeneration Manager
Senior Democratic Services & Elections
Officer

Other Member(s) in Attendance

Councillor Beki Aldam

001 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Housden.

002 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

003 Minutes

Resolved That the minutes of the meeting held on the 4 March 2021 were approved as a correct record.

004 Public Question Time

There were none.

005 Petition

Debbie Bird introduced the petition which had been signed by 3570 people. She advised that children's lives had been disrupted due to the pandemic and that people should be working to make sure the facility stayed within the district. She asked the Committee to consider the community support that the facility had received and informed Members that before the pandemic Rush had welcomed over 1,000 visitors a week. She requested that the council allow Rush Skatepark and the other businesses at Brimscombe Port an extension on their lease until January 2022.

The Chair advised that the report regarding Brimscombe Port would be brought forward on the agenda and Members would be able to ask questions and debate the item further at this stage.

006 Tenancies at Brimscombe Port - Rusk Skatepark and Grace Network

The Head of Property Services introduced the report and provided an update from the Parish Council which advised that they wished to see the continuation of social enterprises on the site for as long as possible and that concerns had been raised. The concerns raised included the timescales for demolition and the ending of leases to early on in the process, the risk of increased anti-social behaviour and the addition of another derelict industrial site along the valley. The Head of Property Services advised that the redevelopment was about bringing the canal back into the community as the centrepiece to a new sustainable and exciting, exemplar development. It was highlighted that further delays to the programme could have an impact on the council's credibility and ability to secure high quality bids from interested partners and jeopardise the project as a whole. It was confirmed that the council had already extended the end dates for occupying the units for tenants and had liaised with them and advised them of the anticipated programme regularly since 2015. The Head of Property Services advised that the report and equalities impact assessment acknowledged the importance of Rush Skatepark and Grace Network and the facilities and services they provided to some of the most vulnerable members of the community. Officers and partners had worked towards securing new premises for all of the sites before vacant possession was required however an extension to the leases would not guarantee that new sites could be secured for the tenants.

Councillor Pearson asked for clarification over the timelines, it was confirmed that demolition would start in September or October and that work had already begun starting with demolition and asbestos surveys. It was also advised that due to bats being present some buildings would need to be demolished between October and February.

Councillor Braun asked whether any interest had been received from potential developers. The Head of Property Services advised that they had received interest which included approximately 6 emails from interested parties.

Councillor Hurst asked officers to confirm whether timescales included in the report would favour national developers rather than local consortia who may wish to create a joint venture. The New Homes and Regeneration Manager stated that they would do everything they could to ensure that as many developers as possible were aware of the opportunity.

In a response to a question about the support that had been provided to the Grace Network and Rush it was confirmed that the Council had offered council premises to Grace Network and Active Gloucestershire had been supporting Rush. Active Gloucestershire would be able to increase the level of support provided if this was the Committees request.

Councillor Aldam, Ward Councillor, asked if there was scope for Rush or other tenants to be included on the new site as part of the proposed mixed use facilities. It was advised that the site required housing to make it viable and the community facilities proposed would not be suitable in terms of size for a skatepark however the site had been offered to the Parish Council to bring forward for community use.

Councillor Aldam also asked whether a community council meeting could be arranged to ensure that community engagement remained an important part of the project. She asked whether the meeting could be structured to allow for the views of children and young people to be heard. The Head of Property Services confirmed that they would be happy to arrange a public meeting as soon as possible.

Councillor Braun proposed to include an additional section in the decision 'a) Recognise the significant services to the community delivered by the social enterprises in Brimscombe Port, and also recognise that the buildings are not suitable or safe for long-term use. Therefore the Council will continue to work with Rush and Grace Network to find suitable permanent homes'. Councillor Cornell seconded the amendment and it was confirmed with the agreement of the whole committee to be included as a friendly amendment.

Councillor Hurst proposed an alternative amendment which included the word 'timely' between ensure and vacant in section a of the decision and the inclusion of the following sections:

- 'b) In the case of Unit 3 (RUSH) this will be assessed on a monthly basis. The Committee notes that the previous lease has expired and the tenant has not sought to renew it, so is in effect in breach of lease conditions
- c) The Head of Property Services is instructed further to open discussions with the tenant to explore again the opportunity to relocate to a new site, possibly Stratford Park, through a joint venture company.
- d) In the case of Units 1a, 2a and 4 (The Grace Network) formal legal action will be deferred for three months only, to allow the tenant specifically to relocate stock and etc. to alternative premises.
- e) The demolition of units 1 (Canal bookshop) and unit2 (Inside Football) will be initiated with immediate effect, to enable easier development of the Port going forward.'

Councillor Davies seconded the amendment.

Councillor Hurst advised that his proposal is an attempt to give some elasticity to the tenancies for the 2 tenants and that because of the differences in the tenants a different approach for each could be taken. Councillor Hurst stated that the addition of section b would allow a more dynamic assessment of when Rush should be asked to vacate their premises, and that section c would allow hopefully allow the debate to be reopened regarding the use of Stratford Park. The addition of section d would allow the Grace Network time to relocate and section e would allow some progress to be made on the site in terms of creating access. Councillor Hurst stated that he believed the timescales to be optimistic and that by adjusting these the council may be able to ameliorate the situation.

Councillor Tucker asked whether Councillor Hurst thought that amendment to the timescales could endanger the funding and contingencies in place. Councillor Hurst advised that he was aware that it was a risk although if building costs were continuing to rise the value of the site should also rise.

Councillor Turner raised concerns regarding the safety of starting demolition whilst Rush was still on site operating as a children's facility. Councillor Hurst stated that this would need to be given consideration and that a risk assessment would need to be carried out, however he stated that the site is quite large so fencing could allow for the separation needed.

In response to questions regarding the proposal of a joint venture company Councillor Hurst advised that he believed it could be viable because of the financial support, grants and sponsorships available. The Strategic Director of Resources advised that further extensive work would need to be carried out and a report would need to be brought back to committee before a decision could be made.

Councillor Davies commended Councillor Hurst's knowledge and passion and advised that the proposed amendment was not meant to be disruptive to the programme. He drew Members attention to paragraph 3.27 which stated that any occupation beyond September would jeopardise the project, and advised Members that the proposed amendment was only suggesting an extension until September.

The Chair confirmed that although she was not able to support the amendment the offer made to Rush at Stratford Park remained and could be reconsidered by the tenant if they wanted to.

The amendment was put to the vote receiving 3 votes for, 8 against and 1 abstention.

Members continued to debate the substantive. The chair acknowledged the difficulty of the decision Members were being asked to consider especially due to the toll the last year had taken on young people. She confirmed that there were still opportunities to provide further support and that even if a decision was made to extend the leases there would be no guarantee that the tenants would find alternative premises.

Councillor Pearson asked Members to remember that the development of Brimscombe Port was intrinsically linked with the development of the Canal and that the development could not be delayed any further. He also stated that the tenants were made aware from the outset that they would need to vacate their premises to allow for the redevelopment.

Councillor Brine stated that members needed to make a hard decision in order to ensure that the site could be developed without delay and that Committees could look into what further support could be provided for the tenants.

Members provided statements in support of the decision and further reinforced the need for additional support to be considered and offered to the tenants.

Councillor Percy suggested that a focus needed to be placed on communications going forward and ensuring that the correct messages were being presented to the wider community.

Councillor Braun in summing up thanked Members for their wide ranging debate and recognised the difficult decision being considered by Members. She stated that it was now the time to make a decision due to the timescales being presented and the Council would do anything that it could to support Rush and Grace Network who were themselves helping to support our communities.

On being put to the vote, the motion was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED a) To recognise the significant services to the community delivered by the social enterprises in Brimscombe Port, and also recognise that the buildings are not suitable or safe for long-term use. Therefore the Council will continue to work with Rush and Grace Network to find suitable permanent homes.
b) To delegate authority to the Head of Property Services to take all necessary steps, including legal action, to ensure vacant possession of all the units required to be demolished as part of the redevelopment of Brimscombe Port including Unit 3, Industrial Estate, (occupied by RUSH Skatepark) and Units 1a, 2a and 4, Business Park, Brimscombe Port (occupied by the Grace Network), if they are not vacated at the end of June 2021.
c) To approve the Write-Off of Sums owed by Inside Football as recommended by the S151 Officer.

007 Appointment of Performance Monitors

Councillors Pearson and Housden were appointed as Performance Monitors.

008 Member/Officer Report (To Note)

- a) Property Review Update
A report had been circulated. The Head of Property Services confirmed that many of the reviews had been delayed due to the Pandemic.
- b) Leadership Gloucestershire Update
The Chief Executive advised that there had not been a meeting since the last Committee and an update would be brought to the next Committee.
- c) Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee (GEGJC)

The Leader confirmed that the Committee had met yesterday and provided a verbal update confirming that they had looked at the economic recovery across Gloucestershire and that the County had produced a data dashboard. A decision was also made with regards the business rates pool to allocate funding to support the local plan and transport, the district would be receiving funding towards this.

- d) Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee (GEGSC)
Councillor Turner provided an update confirming that GFirst LEP had introduced the Committee to the Local Industrial Strategy and the priorities around the shift to net zero and the work they were carrying out with local businesses. The Committee also discussed the strands of the post Covid recovery and future transport plans.
- e) Strategic Recovery Board
A report had been circulated. The Strategic Director of Place provided further updates to the Committee regarding the Canal Corridor Strategy which had begun and the One Public Estate funding which a further opportunity had arisen to secure further funding for 4 sites across the district which were already in the New Homes Programme.
- f) Corporate Delivery Plan Progress Update Q4
A report had been circulated. Councillor Percy asked for clarification as to how much of the business rates pilot fund had been used to fund elements of recovery work. The Strategic Director of Resources advised that there was approximately £500k left in the business rates pilot fund but did not have the exact figures to hand.
- g) Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan Progress Update Q4
A report had been circulated. No questions were asked.
- h) Support of the Leisure Contract Provider in Stroud (Sport and Leisure Management) to Recover from the Impact of Covid-19 Update
Support of the Leisure Contract Provider in Stroud (Sport and Leisure Management) A report had been circulated. In a response to a question from Councillor Davies the Strategic Director of Resources advised that the Council had helped the Leisure Centre up to the end of November and the National Recovery had helped them from December to March.

009 Members' Questions

There were none.

The meeting closed at 9.18 pm

Chair