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## SOUTHEND-ON-SEA BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Meeting of Transport, Asset Management & Inward Investment Working Party

**Date: Thursday, 23rd September, 2021**

**Place: Virtual Meeting via MS Teams**

**Present:** Councillor R Woodley (Chair)  
Councillors M Berry, K Buck, P Collins and D Cowan

**In Attendance:** A Richards, N Hoskins, K Gearing and T Row

**Start/End Time:** 6.30 pm - 8.00 pm

#### **1 Apologies & Substitutions**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Moring (no substitute).

#### **2 Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared at the meeting.

#### **3 Notice of Motion - Kursaal Comeback**

The Working Party considered a report in response to the notice of motion referred to it by Council at its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021 (Minute 179 refers). The motion sought the Council to note the following statements:

- There is a widespread desire in the town to see the Kursaal open to and designed by the public, for the benefit of residents and visitors alike, and a concern at the possibility of the building decaying;
- Since September 2020, the local arts and community residents' co-operative Concrete Culture have been investigating potential ideas for getting the Kursaal back in use and how to make the best use of it for the people of Southend;
- The public consultation run by Concrete Culture on the future of the Kursaal received over 1,100 responses from every ward in Southend. This has brought forward a surge of interest in the Kursaal and its potential uses; and
- The Council owns the freehold of the Kursaal building.

The motion also sought the Council to make the following resolutions:

- To seek to reacquire the lease of the Kursaal in order to reopen it to the public, in a way that both preserves its rich heritage and delivers the best option for local taxpayers.
- To work with Concrete Culture to explore the ideas sourced from Southend residents, and find a way to realise Concrete Culture's vision for the Kursaal, co-created and produced with Southend residents.
- To explore all possible funding options to ensure that the Kursaal has a strong and lasting future at the centre of Southend's identity.

The Working Party debated the motion and asked a number of questions, which were duly responded to by officers.

The Working Party was advised that the Council should avoid making any resolution to acquire the lease until such time as the full cost, potential and liabilities are clearly understood. To do so would require the Council to make potentially a significant unknown financial commitment which could put significant pressures on the day to day running of the Council and on the Council's overall financial sustainability. Whilst the Council owns the freehold, a very long leasehold interest has been sold and all the value sits in the leasehold interest.

The Working Party noted that work was currently underway and continuing with Concrete Culture (and through them with a wide interest group including residents) to develop the proposal. Various funding options were also being considered and various surveys had been commissioned by the Council which will assist with understanding the capital and revenue costs and risks associated with the Kursaal and any elements of condition requiring particular attention. It was therefore:

Resolved:-

That Cabinet be recommended:

(1) to note the statements set out in the motion;

(2) Not to seek to reacquire the lease until such time as it fully assesses the costs and liabilities associated with the Kursaal and to consider the options for intervention. This needs to be assessed against the Council's wider budget position recognizing the ambition to see the Kursaal reopen it to the public, in a way that both preserves its rich heritage and delivers the best option for local taxpayers and maintains financial sustainability for the Council;

(3) To work with Concrete Culture to explore the ideas sourced from Southend residents and look at ways to evolve and realise Concrete Culture's vision for the Kursaal through a financially viable and self-sustaining operating model, which has been co-created and produced with Southend residents and with appropriate external funding input to create and operate any sustainable model;

(4) To explore potential funding options, for all interested parties, including the Levelling Up Fund (Round 2) and the Community Ownership Fund, which may help to secure a strong and lasting future for the Kursaal as an important part of Southend's identity; and

(5) To continue the dialogue with the leaseholders, particularly in relation to their plans, potential occupiers, the condition of the building and compliance with the lease terms.

#### **4 Notice of Motion - Wildflower Verges**

The Working Party considered a report in response to the notice of motion referred to it by Council at its meeting on 15th July 2021 (Minute 181 refers). The motion sought the Council to:

- work to pilot a scheme whereby roadside verges on non-residential roads in safe locations in Southend can be planted with wildflowers to provide increased biodiversity and natural habitat;
- carefully coordinate maintenance of all roadside verges to prioritise the natural environment of the Borough; and
- phase out the use of glyphosate and other such environmentally damaging chemical herbicides and pesticides within the Borough.

The Working Party noted that works had already been undertaken over a number of years to naturalise suitable areas of highway verge and the commitment made by the Cabinet Member for Environment, Culture, Tourism & Planning to investigate alternatives to the use of glyphosate for the control of unwanted vegetation.

In response to questions regarding the use of plants to improve the air quality, it was suggested that the potential use of Cotoneasters be investigated. Planting these in the verges would help clean the air and filter particulate but would also create a natural protective barrier to prevent parking on the green verges.

Resolved:-

That Cabinet be recommended:

1. That the motion relating to the environmentally sound management of roadside verges, be noted.
2. That the continued naturalisation of highways verges in locations identified by officers in consultation with relevant portfolio holders and ward councillors, that meet the requirements of both highways' operational maintenance and environmental considerations, be supported.
3. That awareness raised and understanding of the benefits of naturalised grass areas be promoted.
4. That alternative options around the use of glyphosate-based herbicides be developed and reported at a later date.

## **5 Notice of Motion - North-South Public Transport Service**

The Working Party considered a report in response to the notice of motion referred to it by Council at its meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021 (Minute 841 refers). The motion sought the Council to establish a North/South viable single public transport service to align directly London Southend Airport, The Airport Business Park, St. Laurence Ward, Eastwood Park Ward, Belfairs Ward, Blenheim Park Ward, Leigh & West Leigh Wards and Leigh Railway Station.

The Working Party noted that since the Notice of Motion had been submitted, the Department for Transport (DfT) had published the National Bus Strategy, Bus Back Better, (BBB) in March 2021. The Bus Strategy's aim is to encourage increase patronage and improved facilities. The BBB requires Local Transport Authorities to produce a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) by the 31st October 2021 and enter into an Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators by the end of 31st March 2022. The DfT's current position is that these deadlines

would not be moved and are final. Therefore, officers were working towards producing the BSIP to meet this deadline. Furthermore, the DfT is consulting on proposals to make the Bus Service Operator Grant contingent on bus operators being members of an Enhanced Partnership or Franchising arrangement. Therefore, in line with the above, Councillors, Stakeholders and Bus Operator engagement are underway and a North – South route has been raised by councillors during the first council briefing.

It was therefore recommended that officers continue to establish a list of schemes being suggested during the BSIP consultation and activities, and to then assess schemes to be brought forward for further analysis. Following this analysis and, subject to funding, if it is established a North – South route would be required, then a tender process would be put in place, this is because the cost of providing such a service would fall within tendering requirement, which may have financial implications for this Council to provide such a service.

Resolved:-

That Cabinet be recommended to note and endorse the recommended course of action suggested.

## **6 Notice of Motion - Government Levelling Up Fund**

The Working Party considered a report in response to the notice of motion referred to it by Council at its meeting on 4th March 2021 (Minute 838 refers). The motion sought the Council to submit a bid for a Shoebury bypass to connect the east of the town to the north of the River Crouch to Central Government when the Levelling Up Fund is opened for submissions.

The Working Party discussed the motion in some detail and noted that there was insufficient time to submit a bid of the nature nor would there be the level of finance available through this fund.

Resolved:-

That the Notice of Motion be noted and that Cabinet be informed that whilst the aspirations in the motion are supported, alternative funding would be required.

## **7 Notice of Motion - Traffic Emissions Reduction in Southend**

The Working Party noted that this notice of motion had been referred to it for consideration by Cabinet. However, on the basis that the new Head of Sustainability would not be joining the Council until 27th September it was agreed that the Notice of Motion regarding Traffic Emissions be considered at another meeting once the new Head is in post.

Resolved:-

That consideration of the notice of motion regarding traffic emissions be deferred to a future meeting once the new Head of Sustainability is in post.

**Chair:** \_\_\_\_\_



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