

SOUTHWOLD TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Town Council of Southwold, held at the Methodist Hall at 7.00pm on Tuesday 18th February 2020

PRESENT:	Councillor	
		I Bradbury – Town Mayor
	“	Ms E A Betts
	“	D Beavan
	“	S Flunder
	“	Mrs P Goldsmith
	“	Mrs J Jeans
	“	Ms J Jordan
	“	M Ladd
	“	M Rowan -Robinson
	“	S Tobin
	“	J A Windell

Also present; 59 members of the public, and the Town Clerk, and High Steward and Mrs MossKing.

The Town Mayor welcomed all to the meeting and set out the format for the meeting.

1. Apologies: *To receive apologies for absence.*

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr M Tucker.

2. Declarations of interest:

a) To receive any declarations of Personal Interest regarding the agenda.

There were no Declarations of Personal Interest.

b) To receive any declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests regarding the agenda.

Nil.

c) To note the decision of the Town Clerk regarding requests for dispensations relating to this agenda.

Nil.

d) Councillors to be reminded of the requirement for them to individually update their Register of Interests as appropriate.

The Town Mayor reminded members of their legal requirements to update the Register of Interest online.

3. Minutes: (i) To approve and sign the minutes of the Meeting of the Town Council meeting held on Tuesday 28th January 2020

On the proposal of Cllr Tobin, seconded by Cllr Betts it was RESOLVED by all to approve the Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 28th January 2020.

4. Public Forum

The Town Mayor introduced Mrs MossKing and explained that the Town Council had commissioned MossKing Associates to write a business plan for the alternative proposal. The Town Mayor asked members that standing orders be suspended at any time to allow Mrs MossKing to speak. **On the proposal of Cllr Windell, seconded by Cllr Jeans it**

was Resolved with 1 abstain that standing orders be suspended at any time to allow Mrs MossKing to speak.

The Town Mayor advised that he would give ample time for members of the public to raise questions and that this would not be restricted to Southwold residents.

- a) *To receive comments from Southwold electors on matters on the agenda.
(each elector will be allowed a maximum of 3 minutes. 10 minutes will be allocated overall for this section subject to Town Mayor discretion).*

A member of the public advised that the Town Council is accountable to the electorate and that there was a need to retain and protect existing businesses, and that a large number of offices is not required. Mention was made of heat pumps being incorporated within the alternative proposal and a query was raised as to the effect of decontamination remediation on the shops along Hurren Terrace.

A member of the public thanked both architects for providing proposals for an alternative plan at nil cost

A member of the public asked for clarification as to how an alternative plan had been arrived at and what factors had been included.

A member of the public suggested that STC needed to give assurances to existing tenants.

The Chairman clarified that the tenants have the opportunity to talk to councillors/council at any time.

A member of the public suggested that with the premises at Lords Terrace already constructed, and the impending sale of police/fire station site, 'enhancing the entrance to the town' would not be possible for the Town Council to achieve.

A member of the public asked whether the CCF grant monies were in jeopardy, whether a development manager had been appointed, and advised that the Town Council had a moral and legal requirement to make sure that the ground was not contaminated and suggested that the alternative proposal did not seek to address the latter.

A member of the public asked about the business manager.

Those present were advised that the Town Council had approved the appointment of a Town manager from its own financial resources.

There being no further questions the public participation was closed.

5. To receive and consider the Business Plan for the alternative proposal for Station Yard.

The Town Mayor thanked everyone for attending and advised that the alternative proposal would need to be considered for suitability/acceptability/feasibility and risk. The Town Mayor advised that the business plan has been available on the Town Council website. The Town Mayor confirmed that Councillors will be given the opportunity to come back to speak as/ when agreed through the Chair.

Cllr Flunder responded to the query from a member of the public above regarding how the alternative proposal had been arrived at. Explanation was provided of how many workshops/offices were incorporated within the proposal, that there was flexibility within the design, and that there were no live/work units.

On the proposal of Cllr Windell, seconded by Cllr Flunder, it was agreed to confirm receipt of the business plan.

The Town Mayor suggested that the non-financial aspects of the alternative proposal be considered first and then the financial details.

Cllr Windell displayed some photographs to those present and expressed concern about the structure of the existing building and queried the suitability of using the 100-year-old internal structure as a basis on which to reclad/build on. Query was also raised about the suitability of the width of the vehicular access for building machinery/plant to access the rear of the site.

Cllr Windell showed some photographs from the site of broken pipes under the surface of the courtyard and advised that decontamination remediation would need to be carried out irrespective of the end project.

Discussion took place regarding potential decontamination. The Town Mayor confirmed that the decontamination issues at the site were the same for any project, and that as landlord of the site the Town Council would need to exercise the necessary duty of care.

Discussion took place about the structural aspects of the alternative proposal. Cllr Beavan advised that a structural survey had been carried out and that if required, an engineer's report would be welcomed.

Cllr Rowan Robinson asked that it be noted that the Town Council had complied with the requests made in the petition raised in 2019.

Cllr Rowan Robinson advised that there were parts of the alternative proposal which were attractive such as the inclusion of a garage, a bike shop, and workshop space – noting that the Enterprise Hub also offered flexible design and could provide the latter. Concern was expressed at the extent of the liability that would fall onto a tenant for the garage space as one 'head tenant' would be required to take on the main liability.

Concern was also expressed at the £2million cost of the alternative proposal versus the expected lifespan of 20/30 years, the resulting value of the refurbished units, and the specific cost of refurbishing the large garage area. Cllr Rowan Robinson suggested that the positive features of the scheme should be an aim of the Town Council.

Cllr Jordan also expressed concern about the cost versus the short lifespan

Cllr Jeans asked about the proposed build and the use of existing structures and asked whether structural engineers, builders, the building inspector and builders' insurers, were in agreement that such a build could take place. Concern was expressed that no structural engineers report had been provided to the Council. With regards to the proposed garage space, Cllr Jeans asked about the feasibility of paying more rent than at present for less space, the feasibility of restricting the number of vehicles to the 6 spaces, the responsibilities of being a head tenant, the need for 2 garages, and the suitability of having a bike shop within this area.

Cllr Ladd advised that the alternative proposal seems to have similarities with the Enterprise Hub. Cllr Ladd asked it to be noted that the Enterprise Hub was not ‘posh offices,’ that it offered flexible spaces, and that there would not be a cost of £2500 per resident as had seemed to have been suggested, as the balance of cost would be funded by the sale of a property as a diversification of the present property portfolio. Cllr Ladd advised that the tenants have been party to discussions about the redevelopment over many years, and that the suggestion of leaving the corner shop, as is, within the alternative proposal was an attractive one, and that the inclusion of garage also offered a solution, but that placing new cladding onto an existing structure was not value for money.

Thanks were extended to the task and finish group for the alternative proposal.

Cllr Windell voiced concerns about spending £2m on a scheme with a 30-year life span, and that the location of a garage at the back would compromise the potential for a landscaped courtyard for use by the residential tenants of Hurren Terrace and the public. Cllr Windell advised that the existing planning application for the site contains flexibility of use and mixed-use spaces.

Cllr Tobin asked whether placing a garage at the front of the development could be achieved.

Cllr Goldsmith asked for permission to raise queries from Cllr Tucker – this was agreed by all.

Queries relating to suitability, acceptability, feasibility and risk were raised together with cost of the alternative scheme.

Cllr Goldsmith voiced concerns about spending £2m on a project with a 30-year maximum lifespan and the subsequent need for the Council to spend money again on the site after 30 years.

Cllr Jeans spoke about the need to support all of the town, mentioning that the primary school needed more young children and thus the inherent need to bring more young people to the town. Cllr Jeans advised that with a garage on the site the alternative proposal becomes financially unsustainable.

Cllr Flunder advised that Jon Plummer had carried out a structural survey and that the existing structures had been deemed suitable for use to deliver the alternative proposal, although they would need additional bracing and alterations would be required to the frames. An enlarged entrance to Blyth Road would be created to enable plant to access the site. The cost of £2m excludes decontamination remediation as does the Enterprise Hub costings. Cllr Flunder expressed concern about the recoverability of income from the Enterprise Hub scheme and asked whether that scheme was viable – and asked that both the alternative proposal and the Enterprise Hub schemes be considered.

The Town Mayor advised that that the structural report had not been in the public domain as it had been completed pro bono and permission had not been provided by the author.

The Town Mayor advised that the next part of the discussion would be about the financial information.

Cllr Beavan advised that the refurbishment basis of the alternative proposal would wash its face financially within the 30 years.

Mrs MossKing was asked to explain NPV. Cllr Beavan explained re discount rate/inflation rate.

Discussion took place about negative NPV and whether that was acceptable. The Town Mayor advised that the Town Council need to assess the risk versus the benefit. Cllr Flunder advised that the viability of the Enterprise Hub was questionable.

Cllr Tobin suggested that investing £2m now into a scheme to rebuild which would then need investment again in 30 years was not a good investment of Town Council finances – but that there might be a possible comprise in relation to usage of some of the buildings.

Discussion took place about the number of jobs/businesses created within both of the schemes.

Cllr Beavan advised the meeting that the 2 reasons for the alternative proposal were a) to protect the existing jobs/businesses and b) to provide an alternative as the hopes around the Enterprise Hub were unrealistic. Cllr Beavan questioned the advice provided by NWES on the Enterprise Hub scheme regarding potential income streams for managed workspace, and explained to the meeting the history of various office blocks in Norwich which had subsequently been turned into residential flats as there had been no demand for office space. Cllr Beavan explained that the alternative proposal provides flexibility and would pay for itself in 25 years and that schemes with negative NPV are carried out by governments. Cllr Beavan suggested that it might be appropriate to contact CCF to see whether the grant monies might be transferable and asked that the Town Council at least acknowledge the doubts about the existing plan.

Discussion took place about the original criteria and guidelines for the grant funding, and the outcomes that need to be evidenced.

Cllr Ladd advised the meeting of the research carried out/data held by the ESC Economic Development team indicating a lack of small business space in the Waveney area as evidenced by the local business parks being full, and the demand that ESC are aware of.

Recommendation - Cllr Rowan Robinson proposed a motion for which there was no seconder.

Recommendation - Cllr Ladd proposed the following motion; The Town Council do not accept the alternative proposal in its entirety, but there are aspects to be considered and these to be considered over the next few weeks, but not to put the CCF grant at risk.

Proposal seconded by Cllr Windell.

Discussion then took place about the motion above and how this could be moved forward. Suggestions included looking at the ability to amend some uses with the

Enterprise Hub scheme, meeting with the task and finish group, and having discussions with CCF.

It was RESOLVED on a majority of 8 in favour, 2 abstain and 1 against that; The Town Council do not accept the alternative proposal in its entirety, but there are aspects to be considered and these to be considered over the next few weeks, but not to put the CCF grant at risk.

Cllr Ladd suggested that the Town Council should also consider the sale of the site.

Standing orders were suspended at 9pm to enable the meeting to continue for a further 10 minutes. Agreed by all.

The Town Clerk was asked to explain the monitoring of the ongoing project plan/critical paths of the project – Mrs MossKing will continue to oversee these along with the Town Clerk, until such time as a project manager is appointed.

6. **Date of next Town Council Meeting:** Tuesday 25th February 2020.

Signed

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