

Droitwich Spa Town Council

MINUTES of the Meeting of the **RESOURCES COMMITTEE** held at the Community Hall on Monday 7 February 2022 at 6.15 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs K Fellows- Chairman
Councillor EJ Bowden
Councillor GR Brookes
Councillor Mrs J Chaudry
Councillor RP Hopkins
Councillor WT Moy (Ex officio)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors, G Duffy, J Grady, AH Laird, CM Murray & AM Sinton.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors RG Beale, Mrs C Bowden, DM Craigie, A Humphries & RJ Morris.

243. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None received.

244. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 17 JANUARY 2022.

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Resources Committee held on 17 January 2022 at the Community Hall be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

245. REGULAR PAYMENTS REVIEW

Regular Payments Review including list of direct debits and standing orders. Summary as at end of January 2022 taken from Scribe Accounts System. This accords with the Auditors recommended practice to review the regular automated payments [*list attached with agenda for information*]. There were no questions arising.

RESOLVED – That the information was noted.

246. FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT

Fairtrade Fortnight – To receive the attached information regarding the forthcoming National Fairtrade Fortnight. The designated Town Council Representative for the Fairtrade Organisation (Droitwich Spa Branch) is Councillor NR Griffiths [*press release attached with agenda from Fairtrade Organisation for information*]. There were no questions arising.

RESOLVED – That the information was noted.

247. ST RICHARDS HOUSE SECOND FLOOR ROOMS

St Richards House – Second floor rooms. To update on provisional options for the following. Details to be provided by the Town Clerk at the meeting [*Verbal update to be provided*]

1. Consideration towards increasing the availability of lettable office space and associated facilities for tenancy. To include information on some possible funding contributions and sources.

2. To advise of some essential roofing repairs that are required and have been identified during January 2022. Update to be provided by the Town Clerk at the meeting.

The Town Clerk updated from and circulated the following report.

St Richards House – Second Floor

Back ground

The second floor space at St Richards House comprises 6 larger sized rooms which are currently unoccupied apart from some partial storage space. Three of the rooms are completely empty. There are also two smaller ante- rooms adjacent the staircase at the tenanted end of the building. The second floor is linear plan and connected by a single corridor between two stairwells at either end of the building. The attached plan provides the basic outline.

The structure and external roofing at St Richards House is strong and in good repair. There is a rolling ongoing programme of works year on year which maintains services and facilities to regulatory standards, general property maintenance and includes some partial rewiring and led lighting conversion. A more extensive programme of refurbishment and redecoration is an option for consideration because many attributes are original and date back to the 1930's – including single glazed leaded windows, internal décor and floor coverings. Some of these parts may be recommended in the course of the ongoing Peep Survey work and anticipated recommendations for the building. The completed Peep Survey documentation has been collated and submitted for both premises on 2nd February 2022 in line with previously updated timescales.

Essential Repairs and Maintenance – November 2021 & January 2022

The second floor roof line includes two dormer windows at the rear aspect of the building with part flat roofs over two of the rooms. These are both affected by standing water externally and whilst there are no leaks, internal plasterwork has recently become dislodged over a substantial ceiling area below. Arrangements are in hand to achieve a temporary repair for safety reasons and to prevent any further deterioration or water ingress risks, using internal boarding strengthening. A full repair including new plastering and décor will be required in due course.

A second issue is that the large water tank for the emersion heater directly over the existing tenanted offices on the 1st Floor has corroded. The resultant leak has worked into the ceiling void between floors and compromised the plasterwork and some structural integrity in one of the tenanted offices. A similar approach has been taken to make the ceiling safe, replace the corroded tank, pending a full internal plasterwork and décor repair in the tenanted office space.

A similar scenario to the emersion water tank was discovered in November 2021 and affected the larger central heating water tank above the Town Clerks office. This has been fully resolved as part of the work completed through that month for replacement of the main central heating boiler feed and distribution pump.

Scope

Options are presented to consider upgrade and conversion of part or all of the second floor space. This was briefly referenced as a component of the projects and Strategic priorities summary (section 23, g dated 11.01.22), which was provided in the report to support the draft estimates, budgets and precept consideration last month. Relevant extract below.

St Richards House Office Tenancy Arrangements-The Town Council has two valued and long standing tenants who maintain arrangements for office space, facilities and car parking. This is an important source of supplementary income. During the pandemic to date both tenants have maintained their rental payments despite reduced office working. Additional support has been provided throughout the period from the Town Council including reduction in service charges , some grant funding and some internal

redcoration. Both tenants have renewed their commitment to maintain the rental space moving forward in 2022/23 and hope to resume more regular office working. One tenant has recently notified a reduction of their requirement for office space which is currently being adjusted and will present options for re-letting to a further potential user. Scope exists to consider options to create additional office space on the second floor of St Richards House. Tentatively this initiative could be similar to the recently opened Wychavon Pillar facility at the Civic Centre in Pershore and is supported by both WDC and WCC for shared professional advice and some possible funding options. There would be many associated benefits and economies of scale linked to the existing Town Council, Heritage Centre and established tenants operations in the building. Expansion options for rentable office facilities supports the local economy, the working local/from home-hybrid approach and helps towards a reduction of carbon footprint with reduced commutes.

Councillor GR Brookes and the Town Clerk attended the WDC Pillar facility launch day and micro business start – up event which took place on 14 October 2021 at Pershore. Councillor RJ Morris joint hosted the event representing Wychavon District Council in his capacity as, Deputy Leader and Executive Board Member for Economic Growth and Tourism.

The Pillar facilities are impressive and support many key initiatives including economic growth and local economy development, urban and rural regeneration, town centre master planning and recovery & new funding and investment opportunities for local town centres. The take up and usage has been good since launch date which align with economic position and emergence from Covid 19.

Funding Opportunities

The Worcestershire Growth Hub (Worcestershire Business Central) have supported the Pillar project. Preliminary contact has indicated that they can provide similar help, advice and guidance for any considered options at St Richards House.

In addition County Council Elected Ward Members have Divisional Funding available for consideration. In principle this can be put towards improvement, upgrade and maintenance of public buildings, assets and infrastructure- subject to the standard application under writing and final consideration protocols be met. Councillor Brookes has a surplus available for his 2021/2022 Divisional Funding allowance which he has kindly put forward towards consideration to support options for conversion and improvement of the second floor at St Richards House.

Indicative costs with a professionally informed estimate for the options in scope for the space is currently being arranged. This will enable more detailed options to be presented for further consideration. The potential for economies of scale for the aforementioned essential maintenance is important and determines that temporary repairs are made during the interim period, prior to the full extent and scope for the wider scale being made available.

The information was noted. The Town Clerk suggested consideration for a mandate to proceed to look into the various options in more detail to enable further professionally informed updates. This would include draft floor plans, estimates and funding options guidance from the Worcestershire Growth Hub, as referenced in the report. The potential project size will entail further work and time to collate and research all of the information needed for further consideration of options. In general discussion further points raised included confirming eligibility of project funding for any public building / asset, alignment of options to include the ongoing Peep Survey work for energy efficiency.

RESOLVED – To agree mandate to proceed for further research, professional referrals and information gathering for options to support a project for conversion of the second floor at St Richards House into useable and lettable working space. This should include investigating scope for funding options through the Worcestershire Growth Hub together with liaison with peers at Wychavon District Council & Worcestershire County Council. To consider delegation of any further tangible project steps to a working group in due course (Membership to be confirmed at a later stage), once details are collated and made available.

248. KIDDERMINSTER ROAD LAND HOLDING

The Development Appraisal & Marketing Options for the land adjacent to Berry Hill Industrial Estate, Droitwich Spa. The professional planning report was instructed pursuant to minute reference 130 of Full Council on 27 September 2021 and reported to the Resources Committee on 11 October 2021 (Minute reference 147). Simultaneously the Appraisal has been referred back to the Commercial Agents for an opinion towards any marketing options and scope. The update following their further informed consideration is outlined as follows.

“That the planning report highlights many limitations, including that residential development would be unacceptable and getting approval towards any employment development may prove to be challenging. These factors make viable marketing and targeted sector options difficult to take forward. There may be some limited scope for formal recreational use considerations going forwards”.

In the meantime there are other separate emerging possible commercial interest options. These are currently commercially sensitive but when full information does become available, further updates can be provided for Elected Members consideration towards any options [*for information*].

Councillor RP Hopkins suggested solar farm possibilities are considered for the land. Councillor GR Brookes mentioned that whilst the land was designated as strategic gap, this does not necessarily prohibit options for all development. Industrial and Commercial land use were referenced as possible scope, with employment potential - creating jobs, infrastructure and national grid connectivity and growth for the local economy.

RESOLVED – That the information was noted and that options continue to be reviewed for the site and land use.

249. To consider the exclusion of the Public & Press by passing the following motion:

That the press and public be now excluded from the meeting under the provision of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 by virtue of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted which involves financial and legal matters.

RESOLVED – That the press and public be now excluded from the meeting under the provision of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 by virtue of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted which involves financial and legal matters.

250. HERITAGE MANAGER VACANCY

The Town Clerk referred to the confidential paper which had been provided with the Agenda. The position was explained that there had been a succession of vacancies attributed to the existing job share arrangement. The impact affects the business continuity and operations of the Heritage Centre and Town Council overall. There are significant associated costs and time implications including the arrangements for advertising, the recruitment process and staff induction/training. To this effect it is important to consider the scope and all available options for a workable solution that will improve the staff retention and provide ongoing stability. It was also updated that there were connected and wider opportunities to be considered with an

apprenticeship scheme, with funding and bursary support options available through working with Wychavon District Council and Worcestershire County Council. The Town Clerk suggested a working group for delegation and the further consideration of options. The time critical aspect was mentioned to work towards filling the Heritage Vacancy in time for Easter and the start of the tourism season, where possible.

The process for staffing and appointment matters is normally delegated to the Leader, the Mayor, the Chairman of the Resources Committee and the Chairman of the Community & Amenities Committee. Councillor AM Sinton requested that Councillor RP Hopkins also be invited to be part of the working group delegation.

RESOLVED – That a working Group be assigned to consider and take forward the Heritage Manager vacancy and any apprenticeship options. That the Group comprises the Leader, the Mayor, the Chairman of the Resources Committee , the Chairman of the Community & Amenities Committee and Councillor RP Hopkins. The arrangements to be coordinated as soon as possible by the Town Clerk.

251. REMITTANCE CORRECTION

Remittance Correction – To be advised that cheque number 12045 payable to Blue Cross for the sale of Charity Christmas Cards less commission and authorised on 17 January 2022 (within remittances for Resources Committee minute reference 226) has been corrected from £586.80 to £568.80. This is due to an error made in the reconciliation of the charity card sales figures by the Heritage Centre. The outcome is an £18.00 decrease to the originally authorised expenditure total.

RESOLVED – That the information was noted

252. ACCOUNTS FOR PAYMENT.

Creditor accounts in the sum of £8,880.71 were considered for payment [*lists attached with Agenda*].

RESOLVED- There were no further questions arising. That the statement of accounts appended be received and the expenditure totalling £8,880.71 be authorised and duly passed for payment.

The meeting closed at 6.50 pm.

Chairman of Committee

28 February 2022

Chairman of Council

25 April 2022