

Present: (Councillor Frank Pickett), Councillors Tom Ashton, Tracey Abbott, Alison Austin, Richard Austin BEM, Peter Bedford, Michael Cooper, George Cornah, Anton Dani, Anne Dorrian, Paul Goodale, Martin Griggs, Neill Hastie, Martin Howard, Jonathan Noble, Brian Rush, Judith Skinner, Aaron Spencer, Yvonne Stevens, Chelcei Trafford, Peter Watson, Judy Welbourn, Nigel Welton and Stephen Woodliffe

Officers – Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive and s151 Officer, Deputy Chief Executive - Growth, Deputy Chief Executive - Programme Delivery, Assistant Director - Planning and Strategic Infrastructure, Transformation Officer, Democratic Services Delivery Manager, and Civic and Member Services Officer.

#### **4 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Alan Bell, Katie Chalmers, Viven Edge, Deborah Evans and Paul Skinner

#### **5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Paul Goodale declared an interest as a Member of the Boston Town Deal Board, but confirmed he had not participated in the debate or vote on the Business Cases when considered by the Town Board.

#### **6 POINT OF ORDER**

Councillor Stephen Woodliffe raised a Point of Order that the report laid before the meeting had not been subject to Member consultation and full scrutiny and Council should not be asked to make open ended commitments without the project having been fully scrutinised. The comments were supported by Councillors Bedford, Dorrian and Rush.

The Deputy Chief Executive – Growth, also acting as Monitoring Officer for the meeting, responded that the purpose of the Council meeting was to consult all Members on the projects to seek views and comments prior to final decision by Cabinet on 30 March, as the function rested with the Executive not Council.

The decision to be made by Cabinet was to submit a bid to Government for the funding allocated to the Leisure Project as part of the Towns Fund projects, not to commit expenditure for the Geoff Moulder Leisure Centre.

Council had previously agreed to add the Leisure Project to the Capital Programme and further detail of the project would evolve after the funding had been secured from the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities. The remaining projects subject of the reports were externally led.

Councillors Peter Bedford and Stephen Woodliffe left the meeting at 6.40 p.m.

#### **7 BOSTON TOWNS FUNDS BUSINESS CASE SUBMISSION AND ADDITION**

## TO THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME

**It was moved by Councillor Nigel Woodliffe, seconded by Councillor Tracey Abbott and**

**RESOLVED that the meeting be adjourned for up to one hour to allow for a presentation to be delivered to Members and an opportunity for a question and answer session prior to formal debate.**

The meeting resumed at 7.55 p.m.

### **A. Boston Leisure Project**

Councillor Nigel Welton introduced a report by the Assistant Director – Planning and Strategic Infrastructure providing details on a proposal to transform the existing Geoff Moulder Leisure Centre site through significant remodeling and refurbishment to provide improved facilities to support the wider area's health and wellbeing.

The Boston Leisure Project was proposed to be brought forward in collaboration with the Mayflower (Boston College) which was the flagship Towns Fund project. The proposed location of the Mayflower centre was adjacent to the Leisure Centre and provided a distinct opportunity to enable wider regeneration of both sites including Rowley Road and the areas adjacent to the Maud Foster Drain.

The combined project aimed to create a single site/campus/village with the potential to address Boston's health, education, leisure and well-being needs, as well as meeting the requirements of the Towns Fund for regeneration of place and providing improved facilities for residents both in the immediate area and wider Borough. Both the Council and Boston College had vested interests owing to existing land holdings, but also an established operational relationship between the two sites.

The full details of the project were set out in a Business Case, appended to the report, which, subject to any amendments, would be submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) following approval by the Boston Town Deal Board and Cabinet.

The five case business case was based on the Towns Fund Delivery Partner Stage 2 template and comprised of the:

- Strategic Case;
- Economic Case;
- Financial Case;
- Commercial Case; and
- Management Case

The Business Case being approved by DLUHC was a gateway to the Council being able to draw down project funding awarded in the offer Heads of Terms from HM

Government, following approval of the Town Investment Plans in March 2021. The Leisure project had been allocated £2,425,092 of Towns Fund monies, pending full business case approval.

It was highlighted that the business case document was not a delivery plan, there would be further development of the business case and other project milestones before the Council committed to a building contract. Those future milestones would enable the Council to further review the overall development costs, in use revenue costs and operating model for example.

The proposals for the GMLC were set out in the report, which sought to raise aspiration, generate interest and provide a multifunctional space which could be accessible for a variety of users from all areas of the community. The buildings themselves would provide a unique blend of improved leisure facilities and flexible areas which could be used to collaborate with other partners such as health and commercial providers. The summary of core improvements to the centre included:-

- Increased gym enabling 90% increase in fitness space and two studios (100% increase)
- A new wet 'changing village' directly accessed from the main entrance foyer, which served both the leisure pool and training pool.
- The changing village would provide a more gender-neutral changing facility, including single, double, family and disabled changing cubicles. The training pool, primarily used by schools and swimming clubs had simpler group changing facilities with adjoining access to the changing village.
- Direct views of the leisure pool on entering the building reinforcing the sense of arrival and one of the core activities in the leisure centre.
- There would be a single main entrance and reception / concierge for staff to greet the public and manage access to both pool facilities and the gym.

The aim was for the facility to be open in September 2024, with the first full year of operation being 2025/26.

Through collaboration with Boston College's Mayflower project, there was the opportunity to create a single space comprised of a campus/village, which brought together health/well-being, leisure and recreation with education, which placed a new public space at its heart.

This had the following benefits:

- Creation of a 'landmark' destination, in relatively close proximity to the Town Centre and accessible to a wider number of people by sustainable means including on foot.
- Maximising the synergies between the existing and future educational and leisure offer
- Increased footfall, and improved 'dwell time' - potential to improve safety and security

- Improved sense of place and visual improvement to public and private spaces
- Raised profile - better integration with surrounding environment.

The detail of the financing for the project was set out in the report, including options to undertake additional works to the health suite. The estimated capital investment required for the Boston Leisure Project was £3.81m and £4.81m to include additional works to the health suite.

It was noted there were various options for bridging any funding requirements for the project, including use of Reserves, borrowing, securing additional funding (non Towns Fund) or a combination. Officers considered there was sufficient opportunity to consider the most appropriate method of bridging the shortfall as the project developed.

Also of consideration was the limited levels of previous investment into the facility, as evidenced by the backlog of repairs and maintenance along with future requirements which were currently unfunded. There were also invest to save opportunities which would be created through some of the works and changes to operational efficiency which would reduce overall running costs. The business case also set out opportunities for new and improved revenue streams derived from the increased range of facilities and opportunities created by the project as a whole.

It was not presently possible to accurately identify the full cost and revenue implications of the project at a granular level due to the present development of the overall scheme. The estimates and approach were considered to be reasonable and based upon a substantial understanding of the running of the existing facility as well as the advice by relevant professionals who had experience of similar projects. The important factor was to establish the broad scope of likely costs and revenue implications, to enable a business case to be submitted, facilitate the detailed work as part of the delivery phase once funding had been secured from Government.

## **B. Towns Fund Business Cases – Mayflower Project and Boston Train Station**

Councillor Nigel Welton provided an update on the Towns Fund process for approval of business cases as each project required the Council to support submission as the accountable body for the Town Deal.

Boston had received a Heads of Terms offer from Government of £21.9m. To release the funding it was necessary to submit business cases for the projects which formed part of the Town Investment Plan to Government for approval.

There were seven projects as part of the Town Deal, six were externally lead and one project, the Boston Leisure Project (details set out above) was led and supported by Boston Borough Council.

The externally led projects were set out in the report as:-

- St. Botolph's Library and Lighting
- Blenkin Memorial Hall

- Centre for Food and Fresh Produce Logistics
- Healing the High Street and Shodfriars
- Boston Railway Station
- Mayflower

All of the above projects had been approved by DLUHC with the exception of the Boston Railway Station and Mayflower, and support was sought from Council for the Business Cases for those projects to be submitted to DLUHC, subject to approval by Cabinet on 30 March.

The detailed business cases for the Boston Train Station and Mayflower projects were appended to the report and a summary for each project set out in the body of the report with costings.

Concern was expressed regarding the potential financial liability for the Council in respect of the Leisure Project referencing historical leisure projects in the Borough which had created many issues for the Council, and previous investment at the GMLC. It was noted that construction costs had escalated over recent years and would continue to do so as a result of the on-going conflict between Russian and Ukraine.

Council was reminded that the purpose of the meeting was to seek comments and views prior to Cabinet making a decision on 30 March to submit a bid to DLUHC for the funds allocated to the Leisure Project as part of the Towns Fund. If the funding was received full detailed and costed plans would then be produced and be subject to appropriate scrutiny.

Any future funding commitment above that already allocated in the Capital Programme would require full Council approval and an assurance was given that any such decision would be subject to full Member consultation and formal scrutiny.

There was a consensus of support amongst Members for taking forward the Leisure Project and submitting the application for funding to Government. It was recognised that it was an opportunity to provide a modern facility which would be of great benefit to the community. If the costs became unaffordable a decision could be taken to stop the project.

The investment required to bring the GMLC up to an acceptable standard had not been identified, and would be on-going costs as continued repairs and maintenance would not fundamentally address the issues with the facility.

In summing up Councillor Welton stated that it was an ambition of the Council to deliver projects for the benefit of residents, and everyone wanted to see improvements, but this would not be at a financial risk to the Council. The full detail of the construction and costs would be brought before Members and if it proved to be unaffordable would not go forward.

**It was moved by Councillor Nigel Welton, seconded by Councillor Tracey Abbott and**

**RESOLVED**

- 1. That the proposals set out in the detailed report be supported, noting that the business case (Appendix A) would be considered by Cabinet on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2022 in advance of formal submission to Government.**
- 2. That Members support the project, note the requirement to provide funding for it, and in principle support future revisions to the capital programme and Treasury Management Strategy/Prudential Indicators that will be required to finance the project and to enable delivery when the costings and funding package have been finalised.**
- 3. That Members support the principle of the additional works at the site - beyond the scope of the Town Deal, support the intention to review the potential of this opportunity for community and health uses – phase 2, and bring forward costed proposals and business case to support additional funding and investment for those works.**
- 4. That Council supports the submission of the full business cases for the externally managed projects (attached as Appendices to the report): Boston Railway Station and the Mayflower project.**
- 5. That Council notes the submission of the following Towns Fund projects to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC): St Botolph's Library and Lighting, Blenkin Memorial Hall, Centre for Food and Fresh Produce Logistics, and Healing the High Street and Shodfriars. These projects have been approved by DLUHC.**
- 6. That a full programme of Member Briefings and formal scrutiny to be undertaken prior to final decisions by full Council.**

(The meeting ended at 8.55 p.m.)