

13<sup>th</sup> November

## **BOSTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

At the meeting of Boston Borough Council held at the Council Chamber, Municipal Buildings, West Street, Boston, PE21 8QR, on Monday, 13th November, 2023 at 6.30 pm

Present:

The Mayor ( Councillor David Brown), in the Chair  
Councillors Alison Austin, Richard Austin BEM, Peter Bedford, Anton Dani, Anne Dorrian, Stephen Woodliffe, John Baxter, Dale Broughton, Callum Butler, James Cantwell, Emma Cresswell, Neil Drayton, Staurt Evans, Sandeep Ghosh, Mike Gilbert, Paul Gleeson, Andy Izzard, Patricia Marson, David Middleton, Chris Mountain, Barrie Pierpoint, Ralph Pryke, Claire Rylott, Lina Savickiene, David Scoot, Sarah Sharpe and Suzanne Welberry

Officers –

Chief Executive, Assistant Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer, Insights & Transformation Manager, Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officer

### **135 MINUTES**

The minutes of the last meeting, held 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023, were agreed.

### **136 APOLOGIES**

Apologies of absence were received from Councillors; Jyothi Arayambath and Helen Staples.

### **137 COMMUNICATIONS**

The Chief executive confirmed that had been notified that Councillors Richard Austin BEM and Alison Austin had joined the Independent 2020 Group.

### **138 DEPUTATIONS AND PETITIONS**

There were none for this meeting

### **139 QUESTIONS FROM ELECTED MEMBERS**

The chief executive confirmed that four questions had been received;

#### **Question from Councillor Mike Gilbert to Councillor John Baxter**

Like everywhere else in the UK, town centre economies, including Boston's, rely heavily on footfall and spending power. We are a shoreline town with a dispersed population with many people moving out of town to newly built village estates

The nature of Boston's economy has also altered over the last 30 years. Well paid work in manufacturing have gone and in the housing sector its characterised by the replacement of owner-occupied houses with HMOs and an enlarged rental sector. In my

view, there have been significant changes to spending power associated with this and it has placed limits on our opportunities to grow the town centre economy from within.

Whilst I welcome the all recommendations and actions in the Boston Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan only actions T6 and T7 of the Boston Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan seem to address the pressing issue of vacant and dilapidated retail units being converted to alternative leisure or retail uses or more radically into residential accommodation. Thus increasing spending power within the town centre. There are clearly opportunities to develop important properties like the old Mason's shop, REBOS, Rose of Bengal and Pound Stretcher as well as Mills and the Red Cow on Wide Bargate. I am of course mindful that Boston probably has enough slot shops, charity shops, Coffee shops, takeaways and barbers.

Could I ask the Portfolio holder for Housing Building control and Strategic Planning what input he had into the Town Centre Strategy and whether he will be a member of the Town Centre Management Steering Group? Also what if any, actual steps had been taken prior to consultation on the strategy, to move quickly forward with developing these important ambitions? In the absence of any steps taken so far, what is the proposed process to move quickly forward with these ambitions in 2024?

### **Response from Councillor John Baxter**

It is pleasing to note that Cllr Gilbert welcomes all the recommendations and actions in the Boston Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan.

As the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Building Control and Strategic Planning I am pleased to say that I have been involved in the development of the Town Centre Strategy right from its very formative days earlier this year through to its adoption by Cabinet on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023\*. I will continue to be engaged in this important piece of work through my role on Cabinet and where appropriate attendance at the Town Centre Management Steering Group on the occasions where that is required or seen to be useful.

The Council has had long term ambitions to address the issue of vacant and dilapidated retail units in the town. We use a range of mechanisms in order to tackle such concerns. They include maintaining a consistent dialogue with local and regional commercial agents in order to support the marketing of these premises, to better connect those seeking retail opportunities or those that might be looking to invest in residential conversions with those premises owners/landlords of vacant properties in the town centre. In addition to this, through the Boston Town Deal transformation of the town centre has already started with projects such as "Healing the High Street" where grants are being offered to building owners so that they can invest in repairing and restoring historic features to their buildings. Another example of transformation work taking place in the town is the "Rejuvenation of Dolphin Lane". This project has enabled the pedestrian footway along Dolphin Lane to be replaced with Yorkstone paving setts creating a more attractive retail environment to support the ambition for higher footfall in this area.

Looking forward into 2024 Members will be aware that Boston was recently allocated £20 million by the Government specifically for the town centre to be spent over ten years. We have been told that the decision to award this funding was taken by senior people in "Number Ten" and is a real vote of confidence in our administration.

The guidance from the Government has been published and I'm sure that Cllr Gilbert has read it but to remind you, it says in part, "*Interventions could include remediating*

*and repurposing vacant department stores – including converting these to high quality housing”*

Officers are currently working within the Boston Town Centre Strategy Steering Group led by Cllr Broughton and I know that the membership of the Boston Town Deal Board is due to be considered in light of this new government guidance. Whilst I am not currently aware of what that membership will look like, I am confident that it will include all those who have a part to play in this project.

#### **Supplemental question from Councillor Mike Gilbert**

It is both reassuring and sort of concerning that so many threads, themes, funds and teams are involved in what is essentially this vital strategic work for the future of Boston. They say that a Cabinet is a force designed by a Committee and in some senses you almost get the feeling that we have an awful lot of people with an awful lot of involvement in what is essentially quite a straight forward process of transferring, as quickly as we can, vacant retailers and properties into a residential situation. So can I perhaps as a supplementary question ask – What Councillor Baxter views the oppositions role would be in assisting with this process, because it is not just about the administration it is all those of us who believe in Boston Town Centre who have seen it become more and more dilapidated over the year. I would like to have some kind of involvement in taking forward this ambitious agenda.

#### **Supplemental response from Councillor John Baxter**

Thank you Councillor Gilbert, good points I would say. Obviously there has been amazing consultation on the process to do with the Town Deal, it is a living document, the actual plan and the strategy so I am sure the Team who are involved would welcome contributions from anyone within the Elected Members here today. The actual constitution of the board that are going to discuss the things in the action plan has not actually been decided. It is suggested within the plan but I am sure if you have comments to put forward or anyone here tonight, Councillor Broughton would take those on board.

#### **Question from Councillor Claire Rylott to Councillor Anne Dorrian**

Recently the County Council replaced the footpath along Dolphin Lane dramatically transforming the appearance of the area.

Since May we have heard about a Town Centre Strategy and a Zero Tolerance policy within our town which I fully support. Zero tolerance should mean Zero tolerance, it was relaxed during the traveller episode and it seems to be relaxed on Dolphin Lane!

I often walk along the lane to use the Dry Cleaners, I am disappointed at the behaviour of some pedestrians using the lane. I followed a couple to find them stopping at a coffee shop, throwing the cigarette end on the floor before entering the shop and I understand from retailers that often in a morning they are picking up broken glass from the nightclub and everything else that goes with it. The new paving is already becoming stained and discoloured.

Would you please consider installing a CCTV camera along the lane which would hopefully then enable the zero tolerance policy to be enforced on this much improved lane?

#### **Response from Councillor Anne Dorrian**

I thank Cllr Rylott for notice of her question.

I have to say from the outset that I do not accept the premise of some of her statements, simply because she is mistaken. I will turn firstly to the incident with the illegal encampment in Tunnard Street Car Park, which occurred at the end of August 2023. This was unprecedented in recent times.

The numbers that arrived in our town and the effect it had on our services, our businesses and our residents during the 48 hours they were here, had a devastating effect; and for this I can only apologise again.

Our officers worked alongside their police colleagues in order to move this group on; utilising all the powers and legislation which our respective organisations have at their disposal. Local residents can be reassured that officers of this council attended the illegal encampment site within only 90 minutes of the traveller's arrival, in order to conduct the first part of the eviction procedure.

It was on the advice of the police, that our officers were instructed to only attend the site to serve the official eviction paperwork, rather than there being a lack of will to enforce parking and litter offences. Given that our officers took the precaution of wearing stab vests, it was important that their safety was paramount when decision-making was being undertaken in a dynamic way, due to this fast-moving situation.

With regard to Dolphin Lane, I can confirm that our Enforcement Officers patrol the entire town centre on a regular basis but clearly, they cannot be everywhere at once. I can assure Cllr Rylott that they can and do issue fines when they witness an offence; and with regard to Dolphin Lane specifically, in the last six months there have been two FPNs issued for litter, and one report of noise which is currently being dealt with by our Environmental Health team.

As an elected member, I would expect that Cllr Rylott reports ASB or littering offences when she witness them, however, I have been unable to locate any instances when she has done so. Similarly, I would expect that Cllr Rylott advises those retailers whom she's in contact with to report all instances of crime so that an accurate account can be constructed.

With regard to her actual question, I am delighted to inform Council that that as part of the council's successful bid into Safer Streets Fund – Round 4, a new CCTV Camera that covers Dolphin Lane is part of the planned works. This is dependent on some upgrade work to the CCTV infrastructure, which includes some external BT work, but we hope the camera will be up and running before the end of Quarter 4 and I would be happy to keep you all informed of the progress. In the meantime, I have requested that our Enforcement Officers pay extra attention to Dolphin Lane.

### **Supplemental Question from Councillor Claire Rylott**

In the Boston Independent Group Literature in May 2023 there was 7 aims clearly laid out. I am sure you would agree with me that CCTV plays a vital role in achieving four of these aims. I understand that some are not working, some are ineffective due to tree and growth blocking the field of view, others need updating and the CCTV suite has staffing issues. Would the Leader consider a review of our CCTV taking place and assure the people of Boston that a serious increase in the CCTV funding will be a major priority in the forthcoming Council budget discussions.

### **Supplemental Response from Councillor Anne Dorrian**

I am delighted to tell you Councillor Rylott that I am way ahead of you, CCTV as you say is part of my brief. All of our Cameras record for 30 days so to the issue of single staffing and your worry about operatives not being able to cover all the cameras at once that is precisely why we record for 30 days so we can go back and pick up incidents and even crimes when they haven't been witnessed as they have occurred. We also take still

pictures and we check each camera, take still pictures and we lease with Matt Fisher whenever there is issues at present and we are creating a list at present to go and make sure that where we own the trees and shrubbery that we cut it down and where we do not own those live trees and shrubs that we speak to the owners and ask them to cut them down. I am not aware of any cameras not working at present, if you are aware then please let me know and I will pick that up. And lastly I have already been speaking to the Chief Executive, at least two to three weeks ago I asked for a list of all vacancy that the Council are carrying and since that day I have had the list, discussed it with Mr Barlow and he has released the vacancy for one CCTV operative. In my meeting with him this week I am going to discuss the part time vacancy that we are still carrying. I know that we are also looking at a volunteer scheme for the CCTV suite and we are keen to bring on volunteers who can help us, especially with the back room stuff in CCTV where we are looking for offences and rather than have a live operative sit and look through hours and hours of footage we can get perhaps a volunteer to do that who might be interested. So I hope I have covered everything for you Councillor Rylott but rest assured we are on the ball.

**Question to Councillor Emma Cresswell from Councillor James Cantwell** Can you please update us on what new initiatives the Council has implemented, or will be introducing, to support Parish Councils?

**Response from Councillor Emma Cresswell**

Thank you for your question in respect to the Councils support to Parish Councils. I am very pleased to confirm that in October of this year, the first Parish Council Liaison Meeting, led by myself as Portfolio Holder for Communities took place. Understanding the issues that are currently being discussed at Parish Councils and talking through new opportunities supports a strong collaborative working relationship that is very much welcomed.

Specifically in respect to recent opportunities, 'GRASSroots' funding has been made available through UKSPF and has been received by a number of Parish Councils within the Borough of Boston. The GRASSroots scheme provides a fantastic opportunity to deliver projects that bring people together, whether by improving built infrastructure, providing occasions for people to take part in new local activities or volunteering, support digital connectivity of our communities, or support long term sustainability & resilience of community organisations.

**Supplemental question from Councillor James Cantwell**

Thank you Councillor Cresswell for your response. It is clear that the administration does have plans and I look forward to new policies, initiatives and strategies on the matter appearing. Does the Portfolio Holder agree that Boston Council must support Parish Councils more during these difficult times by removing any pressures on them from these GRASSroots voluntary bodies?

**Supplemental response from Councillor Emma Cresswell**

I do believe that we should support our Parish Councils and I think it is really really important that we support them with all of the funding opportunities that are available to them and I would welcome any questions or any information of Parish Councils that need that support and both myself and the officers can help them sure that they are access all of the funding that is available to them.

## **Question to Councillor Anne Dorrian from Councillor James Cantwell**

During the recent Borough election's the Boston Independent Party stressed accountability so now we are approaching 6 months since the election how have you ensured that the Council is being held to account by the local residents, what has changed?

### **Response from Councillor Anne Dorrian**

I thank Cllr Cantwell for notice of his question. You are spot on when you mentioned that we campaigned on being accountable to local residents – and yourselves as Opposition members – and we all relished the opportunity to govern in a way that was much better than what had gone before.

I am delighted to say that the Boston Independent administration is far more open and transparent than any previous administration in living memory.

Within a matter of weeks of taking office we had arranged for all of our committee meetings to be live-streamed so that members of the public can watch from the comfort of their homes. So that's changed! These meetings are then stored on YouTube, thus allowing residents to access the content as and when it is convenient to them. Currently, we are considering how we might improve the audio and visual content of these full council meetings which are held within the chamber. So we expect that to change!

For the first time ever, we have Portfolio Holders attending scrutiny, cabinet and Full Council meetings to deliver their own reports in a way that shows everyone - elected members, officers and local residents - that they fully understand their brief. So that's changed! Unlike previous cabinet members, they don't just turn up and read a briefing note, they answer detailed questions with a good degree of knowledge and understanding, having been intimately involved in the policy development stage of the report.

Members of the administration who represent village wards are also extremely conscientious in attending meetings of Parish Councils to reinforce that link between the Borough Council and the parishes. So that's changed! These councillors share important matters that we are undertaking and are excellent conduits of information. On those occasions where their time is conflicted, they send detailed reports to the Parish Clerk.

We have re-established a Parish Liaison meeting; which sadly had become a long-forgotten, important event - and invited representatives from all eighteen parish councils to come along to meet with the portfolio holder who has that brief, Cllr Emma Cresswell. Unfortunately, we gave the officers a bit of a headache in arranging this because no-one could remember the last time it was done! We have already found ways in which this can be organised better and have implemented changes for the next one which is scheduled for January 2024.

The Boston Independent administration has set up three very important groups in the short time since the election – and these comprise a Business Forum, a Market Traders Forum and a Taxi Forum. So that is a big change! These forums offer a unique opportunity for our local retailers, traders and taxi drivers to meet with Cabinet Members and Officers so that we can share important information. We are delighted with the progress thus far and look forward to the progress as the years go by.

Members of the Boston Independent Group have close links with their local community groups such as; St Nicholas Church Hall in Skirbeck, the Warm Hub in Fishtoft, the Bread and Butter thing in Old Leak and the Asylum Seekers in Swineshead, so that's changed. My fellow Councillors continually seek alternative opportunities to interact with residents and would be willing to work with any of the opposition Members if they wish to bring forward ideas for consideration.

Last but not least, Cabinet has recently decided to encourage local residents to drop in during the 30 minutes before our formal Cabinet begins, we hope that this can operate as an informal surgery, and we will take any questions, rather than have formal questions submitted 48 hours beforehand. This will be a big change. And if it is successful we can look to amend our Constitution to accommodate this going forward.

**Supplemental question from Councillor James Cantwell**

Thank you Councillor Dorrian, it is wonderful to hear that, that has changed.

Further to my previous question, how has this Council encourage residents to ask questions at meetings as mentioned in your parties manifesto? What has been a success since this campaign has taken office and what resources have been dedicated to ensuring our residents can ask public questions?

**Supplemental response from Councillor Anne Dorrian**

Well you are drilling down into a very niche narrow, after me giving you such a comprehensive reply. Shame on you Councillor Cantwell. But I would like to say, I think what I read out demonstrated an exemplar of good Governance where we all clearly have our finger on the pulse. We are all in constant contact with our residents, and have a very good relationship with Community Groups in the wards that we represent. I can say that we spent no Council resources in actually drilling down to invite questions from Members of the public and for the very reason that we haven't had questions from Members of the public, lead us as a Cabinet to consider how we might do that. So, after speaking with the Chief Executive, after speaking with the Community Safety Officer and having a briefing on it Cabinet decided that we would advertise a drop in session hoping that people who lead very busy lives do not have to think about scribing a question 48 hours before a Cabinet meeting takes place so I am happy to keep you posted with how that goes because we are not going to live stream that part of the meeting but I am happy to feedback to yourselves if we do have any success.

**140 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

There were no public questions received.

**141 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

**142 PROCUREMENT STRATEGY - 2023 - 2026**

The Portfolio Holder – Finance presented the proposed Procurement Strategy 2023-2026. The strategy had been created following an action raised in the Annual Delivery Plan 2023/24. It was also a key strand of the South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership Business Case, recognising that through joint procurement the Councils could deliver significant savings.

The report had previously been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Corporate & Community in July, the Audit & Governance Committee in September and Cabinet in October. The report had been updated to include comments received at each Committee, and the strategy had ultimately been referred for approval by Full Council.

The proposed Procurement Strategy focused on three key themes from the National Procurement Strategy. These being;

- Showing Leadership
- Behaving Commercially
- Achieving Community Benefits

The themes were then further broken down into sections which then outline the strategy to improve and enhance the procurement service.

Elected Members commented on their support for the Procurement Strategy, referring specifically to the support that would be made available to local businesses and the savings acquired across the South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership.

**RESOLVED;**

**That Full Council approved the Procurement Strategy 2023/24 at Appendix 1 to the report included within the agenda pack.**

**143 SOUTH & EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCILS PARTNERSHIP SUB-REGIONAL STRATEGY**

The Leader presented the South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership Sub-regional strategy.

The Strategy set out the Partnerships priorities over the next 5 years, including both shared and local priorities. The shared priorities were as follows; Growth and Prosperity, Healthy Lives, Safe and Resilient Communities, Environment, Efficiency and Effectiveness. The local priorities specific to Boston are; promoting arts, culture, heritage and tourism, improving infrastructure, managing budgets and assets, and community safety.

The Strategy had previously undergone significant Member consultation through Member engagement sessions which had been held in September, the outcomes of that session had been presented at a joint Scrutiny meeting in October before being presented at Cabinet.

Two amendments had been identified and rectified since the report had been published;

1. On page 38 of the report West Lindsey District Council had been added.
2. On page 41 of the report a place holder paragraph had been removed.

Members expressed their support for the Sub-regional strategy.

**RESOLVED:**

- **That the Sub-regional Strategy is approved as at Appendix A of the agenda.**
- **That the Sub-regional Strategy become a line of inquiry in the Partnership's Annual Scrutiny.**

(The meeting ended at 7.30 pm)