

CABINET

TUESDAY, 12 MAY 2020 - 4.30 PM



PRESENT: Councillor C Boden (Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor S Clark, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor S Tierney and Councillor S Wallwork

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Amy Brown (Chief Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Peter Catchpole (Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer), Phil Hughes (Head Of Leisure Services), Simon Machen (Interim Corporate Director), Paul Medd (Chief Executive) and Carol Pilson (Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer)

GUESTS: Steve Rosevear of Hatch Regeneris and Ross Ingham of Ingham Pinnock

Councillor Boden welcomed members of the public and press watching the livestream of the Cabinet meeting via YouTube due to Government guidance on social distancing. The meeting was held in accordance with the provision set out in the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 and with Fenland District Council's Virtual Meeting Protocol.

Councillor Boden then announced the sad news that since the last meeting of Cabinet, one sitting Councillor, Cllr Alan Bristow, and previous long standing Councillor, Cllr Kit Owen, have both passed away.

A minute's silence was held as a mark of respect.

CAB32/19 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting held 19 March 2020 were agreed.

CAB33/19 COVID-19 UPDATE REPORT

Members considered the COVID-19 update report presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Boden congratulated officers on the amount of work and dedication which they have shown over the last two months. He said they have gone above and beyond what is expected in order to meet many of the challenges faced and he could not speak highly enough of their effort and professionalism in doing so.

In respect of business grant payments, Councillor Boden reported a slight update to the original report. A total of 1,448 business continuity grants totalling £16.175m have now been paid out to local businesses and a further 57 grant forms received are undergoing further verification. There are still a few businesses that may be eligible that have not yet applied but these are being actively pursued. The Council received from central Government an individual allocation of £21.796m, of which 74.12% has been paid out.

Councillor Tierney said he had received a lot of feedback from local businesses who found the grants very helpful; a number had said they were pleased at the speed that the Council processed their grants and this had been vital for their ability to survive at this time. He had found when

speaking to some other local businesses that if they had heard about the scheme they were unsure as to whether it was genuine, however he had been able to encourage some further businesses to apply. Councillor Boden thanked Councillor Tierney, adding that it was true that some felt it was a fraudulent attempt to gain information, or that they believed they would not qualify because they do not pay business rates, and others thought this was a loan that they would have to pay back; all three of these statements are false but the more we can get the message out, the better.

Councillor Mrs French agreed with Councillor Tierney, some of the businesses she had contacted in March were unaware this is a grant and not a loan to be repaid; however it cannot be made any clearer and hopefully those she has spoken to will now apply.

Councillor Mrs Laws also confirmed and reiterated what Councillor Tierney had said. She had received a number of calls from small local businesses; officers have reacted quickly within days of the applications being approved and this will help them, not all may survive but this gives them help and hope for a positive future in the coming weeks. Some have said they will be writing to the Council with their thanks. Councillor Boden thanked Councillor Mrs Laws.

Cabinet AGREED to note the content of the report.

CAB34/19 MARCH FUTURE HIGH STREET FUND BID

Councillor Boden asked members to determine whether Annexe G of the report, which contains information considered exempt under Schedule 3 of Paragraph 12a of the Local Government Act 1972, should be exempt thereby excluding the press and public from the meeting should it be discussed, or whether the public interest in disclosing this information outweighs the public interest in maintaining the exemption. The confidential motion was agreed.

Members then considered the March Future High Street Fund Bid report presented by Councillor Seaton.

Councillor Seaton welcomed several members of the project group who have worked on the bid and are available to answer any questions, namely Steve Rosevear from Hatch Regeneris, the lead consultants, Ross Ingham, from Ingham Pinnock, supporting consultants, and from FDC, Phil Hughes and Simon Machen, Interim Corporate Director. Councillor Seaton reiterated that this is a once in a generation opportunity to bring considerable positive change to March town centre.

Councillor Boden thanked Councillor Seaton.

Councillor Mrs French thanked Councillor Seaton for the comprehensive summary and agreed it is once in a lifetime opportunity. She said that we are fortunate that March currently has four ongoing projects all interlinking, there being one particular bid that we could not pursue on its own. These include the High Street bid, Growing Fenland and the March Area Transport Study. Councillor Mrs French added she had a slight concern with the interlinking of the Transport Study with regard to March market place and Broad Street. However, the Transport Study is going out for a six-week consultation this week until 28th June and it will be interesting to see the comments received from members of the public and they will be encouraged to support all these schemes.

Councillor Boden thanked Councillor Mrs French and asked all members, officers and consultants if they had any comments to make based on Councillor Mrs French's concern regarding the market place. There were no additional comments.

Councillor Sam Hoy said it was a very good report; she enjoyed reading it and if she lived in March would be excited by the proposals. Generally in other towns there have been visions and

strategies whereas this report gives actual projects, costs and timescales and is the sort of document that we need to be working from in every town.

Councillor Boden thanked Councillor Hoy and asked if anyone had anything to add to her comments. Ross Ingham said he could only reiterate Councillor Seaton's comment upon presentation of the report that the scale of investment on offer from the MHCLG is unprecedented in these challenging times for market towns the size of March. He added that the Hatch Regeneris team had gone into such great detail that this could only be of benefit to the bid, so he is glad to hear that councillors are recognising the opportunity it represents.

Councillor Boden thanked Ross Ingham and also all who had been involved in the production of the report; this had involved a lot of hard work over a long period of time.

Cllr Seaton concurred with Councillor Boden; a lot of hard work has gone into the proposal and everyone involved should be congratulated on the amount of work and time put into it and we can only hope the bid is successful.

Councillor Boden thanked Councillor Seaton, adding that he was grateful members had not felt it necessary to discuss the confidential appendix and therefore take the item into a closed session.

Cabinet AGREED to note the bid document attached to the report and to authorise the Chief Executive to submit the bid to MHCLG, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Social Mobility and Heritage, once the final aspects of the bid has been included.

(Councillor Mrs French declared a non-pecuniary interest, stating for the record that she had a lot of involvement with the High Street bid).

CAB35/19 DRAFT 6 MONTH CABINET FORWARD PLAN

Councillor Boden presented the Cabinet Forward Plan for information. Councillor Seaton commented that it remains to be seen whether the Coates Conservation Area Appraisal will be an agenda item in September as stated currently, but hopefully it will. Councillor Boden said the item would be left on the plan for now but will be changed if necessary.

4.57 pm

Chairman