

No	Action Point	Allocation	Timeframe	Update
28	<u>Introduction and Apologies</u>			<p>Apologies received from: Lee Bevens, Councillor David Connor, Gareth Edwards, Mark Greenwood, Simon Jackson, Emma Nasta, David Rowen, Ann Wardle and David Wyatt.</p> <p>Present: Melanie Bartram, Dino Biagioni, Stephen Buddle, Marcel Cooper, Matthew Hall, Nick Harding (Chair), Phil Hughes, Councillor Mrs Dee Laws, John Maxey, Simon Machen, Tim Slater, Councillor Will Sutton, David Thomas, Jordan Trundle, Gemma Wildman and Martin Williams</p>
29	<u>Review of Action Schedule from Last Meeting held on 19 January 2022</u>			<p>The action schedule was agreed.</p> <p>The following points were raised.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nick Harding stated that there is no further update from Government on the brownfield site fund. • A new staff contact list will be circulated in due course due to the imminent staff changes.
30	<u>Levelling Up Presentation</u>			<p>The Forum members received a presentation with regards to the Levelling Up fund from Phil Hughes Acting Assistant Director at the Council, along with Simon Machen who is a consultant for the Council, who are both involved with the Future High Street Fund Project in March.</p>

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				<p>There is another round for the Levelling Up Fund which is round 2 and the Council intends to bid into that and the focus for that will be for Wisbech. The projects will come to fruition over the next couple of months and this will be publicised. Simon Machen explained that work on the bid process has been underway for a couple of months. Phil Hughes explained that three years ago the Government introduced the Future High Street Fund Scheme and Fenland bid into that and was successful in obtaining some seed funding to develop a bid and the Council received £150,000 to spend with consultants to develop a bid which was submitted for £9.5 million and were successful in obtaining £6.47 million along with some match funding from the Combined Authority meaning the whole project is £8.5 million. Phil Hughes explained that the key interventions for the project are transforming Broad Street which is very much car centric currently and not pedestrian focussed, integrating the riverside area with Broad Street and also Market Square improvements which will be quite limited, but the pavement area outside of the Town Hall will be improved and the car park itself will be resurfaced, along with the street furniture and lighting being improved. Phil Hughes explained that there is also funding in place for vacant units and living above the shops, where there are vacant shops currently, a grant can be obtained to those owners to make improvements to them in order to make them more likely to be let. The additional grant will be for the space above the shops, to improve the space, so that it becomes residential. He explained that a new public toilet facility will also be added to Broad Street which will be in place</p>

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				<p>this year as the current toilet block is due to be demolished and the Market Square improvements are due to take place by November, however if there any concerns re possible delays then that work maybe delayed till the new year. Phil Hughes outlined that the Broad Street and riverside changes will take place in 2023.</p> <p>He referred to the presentation screen and outlined the various changes to be implemented and highlighted the proposed public realm area. Phil Hughes stated that the initial thoughts were that the fountain would not be moved and there would be signalised junction at the top, however when the traffic study was carried out it was decided it would not work given the current amount of traffic that there is in the town centre and the engineers re considered the proposal and it was decided a 17 metre roundabout would be introduced, which they concluded would improve the speed of traffic through the town and should ensure a better traffic flow.</p> <p>John Maxey asked what will happen to the land being removed which is currently highway and what will it be used for. Simon Machen stated that it will become a pedestrianised area and explained that the thought process was that the centre of a market town should not be a car park with four lanes of traffic and car parking in the middle of it due to the fact that from a pedestrian point of view there were concerns about the dominance of cars in that space and therefore that has been the focus as it also meets the funding criteria for the Future High Street grant. John Maxey asked where people are expected to park, and Simon Machen explained that there are</p>

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				<p>plenty of public parking areas within the town of March. Councillor Mrs Laws asked what will happen to the fountain as the proposal includes the installation of a roundabout and she also asked what will happen to the part of the fountain which had previously been reported as missing but had now been located. Phil Hughes explained that the piece of the fountain will be given to the museum of March.</p> <p>He pointed out to the forum the preliminary design and there are still further discussions to be had with members following initial feedback and he highlighted that location of the fountain which will be relocated in the public realm as opposed to now where it is surrounded by traffic.</p> <p>Phil Hughes explained that Broad Street is very much consumed by traffic, which it has to be to some extent as it is one of the two bridges across the river in March and the whole area could not be pedestrianised and there needs to be the allowance of a flow through for traffic .He added that the designers have looked at this and they have identified three different areas, the fountain area, the promenade, and the plaza area at the bottom where there is a lot of public realm area adjacent to the war memorial which will remain in its current position, this will allow a lot more space for pop up shops cafes, community food events and street art. Phil Hughes added that the public toilet will be removed and that area will be opened up completely so that the river area is brought more into the Broad Street environment. Simon Machen stated that part of the drive around the project is for people to be able to enjoy leisure time as currently there is nowhere in Broad Street</p>

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				<p>for people to be able to sit and the café culture is non-existent. He added that the town centre of March, appears to be a hostile environment compared to other town centres and all that can be heard is the noise of traffic. Phil Hughes pointed out that there will only be the removal of 12 car parking spaces from the town centre. John Maxey stated that the roadside car parking spaces along the western side will also be lost. Phil Hughes stated that those spaces are loading and unloading spaces along with a bus stop.</p> <p>Phil Hughes referred to the artist impression slide and pointed out that two double bus bays have also been incorporated into the proposed scheme on each north and south lane. He added that it is proposed that the public realm area will also be a lot wider than in its current form especially where the current Greggs and Tesco area is. He added that it is still only an artist's impression, and nothing has been confirmed including the colour schemes of the various aspects, with still a considerable amount of work and decisions to be made.</p> <p>He advised the forum, that the public toilets and shelter that are being removed will be replaced and sited in Gray's Lane and will have two accessible unisex toilets and a changing places toilet.</p> <p>Phil Hughes explained that members are quite keen for the riverside area to have fewer trees as it looks quite congested. David Thomas stated that he has already fed back that one of the unique selling points in his view for the original bid proposals was the connection between the old course of the River Nene and the town centre. He</p>

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				<p>added that the connection between the heritage and the river is key to the success of March for a vibrant town centre and in his view, it could be something to seriously attract people to the town centre, but at the moment in his opinion the connection is not being made by the proposals. Simon Machen stated that in an ideal world he agrees with the comments made by David Thomas, however there is a finite budget to work with and when the bid was submitted the Council was not in the preliminary design stage as the Council could not incur the cost of a detailed design proposal on the basis of speculative bid for grant funding. He added that the Council is trying to do as much as they can with the budget available and the funding is split across a number of projects which have an independency in terms of the business case and therefore the money does not stretch to that extent of works on the riverside within the budget. David Thomas asked whether what the allowance in the original bid for the works, what it the estimated cost of delivering what the original concept was now and what has been budgeted for the current concept works as the design has been developed. Simon Machen agreed to discuss this further with David Thomas outside of the meeting but agreed that the trees do need to be removed.</p> <p>Councillor Mrs Laws expressed the opinion that the river connection is very important and added that it is part of March. She added that she appreciates that the finances will only stretch so far and added that with the schemes that are in place for the river corridor, if at a later stage more funding could be obtained, could the works be expanded to allow the waterfront area to be</p>

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				<p>opened up more. Simon Machen stated that it would be difficult, and the conclusion would be a very simplified version of what has been presented to the forum, as it is an engineering solution to the riverbank to try and put ramps and seating into it, which would not be a straightforward exercise. He added that developers are aware that the cost of everything in the development industry has significantly increased over the last two years and some of the initial bid work was based on the costs at the time and obviously the grant has not increased to match inflation since the initial bid was put together.</p> <p>Tim Slater stated that there are a couple of listed buildings on Broad Street and the fountain is one of them and he asked what the thoughts of Historic England are with regards to the relocation of it. Phil Hughes stated that there is an ongoing discussion with the Conservation Officer and a conservation specialist has been engaged with in terms of its removal and relocation. He added that the Councils Conservation Officer is of the opinion that with regards to the improvement in Broad Street, that it is worth removing it and its new location is still to be decided. Simon Machen added that whilst it is being removed from its current location it is being placed in public realm where it can be more appreciated than it is currently, and preliminary discussions are being held with Historic England.</p> <p>Martin Williams asked what disabled parking provision is included in the proposal and will be the pedestrian crossing mean that the roundabout will not work in terms of the free flow of traffic.</p>

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				<p>Simon Machen explained that the design work is being led by the County Council Highways Team and their modelling demonstrates that it works and works as a whole better than it currently does. He added that in his experience the vissim modelling scheme which is the method that the highways team are using is generally accurate and he would hope that it does work. Simon Machen agreed to raise the point at the next project team meeting to ensure that there is confidence in place with regards to his question. He added that there is disabled parking provision in Gray's Lane and two on the riverbank and three round the corner which will remain. Simon Machen stated that taxis and buses have been considered along with disabled parking and loading of vehicles following engagement with those stakeholders. He stated that dedicated cycle lanes cannot be included but the traffic speeds along Broad Street should be quite low along that stretch of road.</p> <p>Marcel Cooper stated that currently on Broad Street there is covered cycle parking but on the new scheme there does not appear to be any and in his view that should be retained. Phil Hughes stated that has been raised by other officers and there will be some included.</p> <p>Phil Hughes highlighted on the presentation screen a current mooring point on the river which cannot be used as it is by the pump out station and he explained that it will be opened up and there will be additional mooring capacity as a result of the project within the town and also people will be able to get down to that mooring to interact with the river if they want to as the steps will be open. David Thomas stated that the loss of</p>

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				<p>the pump out facility is controversial in terms of water way users. Phil Hughes stated that Foxes Boat Yard also have a pump out facility which is not that far, and David Thomas explained that the town centre pump out facility differs as the waste goes into the foul network whereas the Foxes facility is taken away by tanker. He added that Foxes Boatyard is also a private facility and if they choose to withdraw their facility that would leave nothing. David Thomas expressed the view that when discussions began regarding the scheme, he was advised that no facilities would be lost. Councillor Mrs Laws stated that she supports the comments made by David Thomas as in her opinion there was no suggestion that this was going to be moved and if Foxes choose to withdraw there is a problem. She asked how many mooring spaces there are at the moment and how many will that figure increase by if the pumping station is lost. Phil Hughes stated that there are currently three platforms, and this is only used for pump out and not or mooring and Simon Machen stated that as part of the bid process the removal of the pump out station was included. He added that the steering group will discuss this issue further.</p> <p>Phil Hughes added that following the meeting of the steering group, there will be a meeting with the Town Council and then business owners in May as the construction works in the middle of town will have an impact. He explained that he expects the construction works to be phased and therefore the traffic flow of one lane northbound and one lane southbound to remain in operation whilst construction is underway to construct the new road on the eastern side and for that new road to be opened up in order for the public realm</p>

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				<p>works to take place, albeit there will be some disruption.</p> <p>Phil Hughes stated that the final design works for Broad Street and the Riverside will take another three months of work prior to procurement and construction next year and then this year the design and build for the Market Place improvements will take place, and if there is an issue that these works could be delayed then they will be postponed till January in order that the Christmas Events in December 2022 can still go ahead.</p> <p>John Maxey whether there is any intention to relocate where the market is held as it is quite an important parking place for the area south of Broad Street. Simon Machen stated that that there is the vision that the traders will naturally migrate to the new public realm area near Barclays.</p> <p>Councillor Sutton stated that he agrees with the comments made by David Thomas with regards to the riverside area and added that the pump out facility, was only installed 5 or 6 years and to lose that facility is a very poor idea.</p>
31	<u>Local Plan Update</u>			<p>Gemma Wildman gave the forum members an update with regards to the emerging Local Plan.</p> <p>The draft Local Plan will be presented to Cabinet on the 12 May and public consultation is to commence in early June for six weeks. This will be the first opportunity for members of the public to see the draft policies, the proposed sites and to make comments.</p>

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				<p>The plan will set a target of approximately 10500 homes by 2040 and is based on the Governments standard method for calculating local housing need which very recently changed as at the end of March the Government published new statistics that feed into the formula which has resulted in a slight increase for Fenland.</p> <p>The key changes to the plan are that it will remove broad locations for growth, which will be replaced with specifics and deliverable sites. The plan will reintroduce settlement boundaries and it will look to support business growth and investment.</p> <p>Gemma Wildman explained that many of the policies that are in the plan will be changed and updated, due to the various changes to national policy since 2014 and changes to the use class order. It will include a number of new policies, such as the requirement for biodiversity net gain.</p> <p>Gemma Wildman explained that when the consultation starts, members of the forum will be advised of the start of the consultation period, and an email including links to the website and how to make comments.</p> <p>www.fenland.gov.uk/newlocalplan</p> <p>The website will include links to the draft plan, the consultation forms and also the evidence base and supporting information.</p> <p>Gemma Wildman highlighted to the forum the dates for the next stages of the Local Development Scheme which was approved in</p>

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				<p>February and shows following the draft Local Plan consultation all comments and information will be reviewed that has been submitted and make any necessary changes and then look to start the pre submission consultation in early 2023 with a view to submitting to Government in April 2023. Gemma advised that from that point on, the process is out of the Councils hands and is down to the independent inspector who will set the dates for the hearings, the examination hearing and following comments and objections to the plan at the hearing, the Inspector will take into account all those views and then issue a report which will get out what changes have to made to the plan and only then can the plan go forward to Full Council for adoption.</p> <p>John Maxey asked whether the viability document will be a specific document on which you will consult or will it just be a background document. Gemma explained that it will just be an evidence-based document on the website. John Maxey asked Gemma, how she envisages the viability matter being properly addressed given that it is a crucial aspect for Fenland. Gemma explained that in any comments made on the policies on the plan there will be the opportunity to state that you don't agree with certain policies or information and link it back to the viability report.</p> <p>David Thomas stated there appears to be a deal of interest with regard to the biodiversity net gain and he asked whether Gemma has any detail on the approach that the Council are intending to take. Gemma explained that it is the 10% requirement for biodiversity net gain and there is nothing additional. David Thomas stated that</p>

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				<p>there is no definition on how it may be delivered on or off site. Gemma stated that there will be information provided on what it means and how it can be delivered. Simon Machen added that there is the hope that emerging local nature recovery strategies will identify habitat banks for offsite mitigation as there will clearly be the need in some instances for offsite provision. He added that the challenges for officers are that once the legislation is fully in place with the appropriate DEFRA guidance, there will be the need to make sure it is a workable process for both the planning authority, stakeholders, and applicants for planning permission. He added that there are a number of planning authorities currently and some are in their infancy with the concept, and some are further advanced, such as a council who has identified surplus land assets to use as habitat banks which developers are able to plug into through financial contribution or direct management through some of those land assets. Simon explained that there is quite a lot of operational work to be undertaken beyond the policy. David Thomas added he is aware that there are a number of aspects to be considered and it will require some careful thinking, rather than leaving it down to developers to come up with solutions and in his opinion if the Council are able to provide a steer, the overall delivery will be better. Simon Machen stated he totally agrees with that point and added that without that clear direction, there is a danger that the planning system will come to a halt, which needs to be avoided and there needs to be assurances that the biodiversity net gain is achieved but at the same time, it must not stop development investment happening.</p>

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				<p>Dino Biagioni asked Gemma Wildman to clarify what the criteria is for setting out whether a site is deliverable. Gemma stated that the information submitted at the issues and options stage is being looked at, and the capacity of the site is also being looked at along with all other contributions that would effect that. Dino Biagioni questioned what the case would be if the information provided at the issues and options stage has changed or is likely to change. Gemma Wildman stated that it could change, and that is partly what the consultation is for. She added that work has taken place to look at the sites for the five-year land supply as well.</p>
32	<p><u>Changes to the Planning System</u></p>			<p>Nick Harding stated that on page 272 of the Levelling Up White paper, there are only a couple of pages relevant to planning and some of the information has been reworded from previous announcements from the Government, when it was contemplating changes within the planning sector.</p> <p>He added there is a proposed simplification of the Local Plans process, ensuring the at the public can engage in the Local Plan process more easily and they can influence the content of those plans more easily. Nick Harding explained that they are looking at new models to be rolled out in relation to securing developer contributions towards infrastructure provision and also looking at the planning system to provide better support to town centre regeneration, changes to permitted development regime and changes of use,</p>

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				<p>temporary uses, and temporary changes of use. Nick Harding stated that changes to heights of existing building. He added that Government is also looking at improving democracy with regards to engagement of the public in decisions on planning applications. Nick Harding highlighted that the Government are keen on supporting environmental protection through the planning process.</p> <p>He explained that he is sure that the Government will follow these ideas up with a series of consultations on how they consider the changes could be rolled out.</p> <p>Nick Harding explained that there have been changes with regards to relaxation of mobile phone masts, but these will not impact on agents and developers.</p>
33	<u>Staffing and Performance Update</u>			<p>Nick Harding gave an update on staffing and performance, and he provided an update on validation where the backlog has been reduced by a week and the timescale is now a 4-week delay. He added that there are some additional resources in place to assist with reducing the validation backlog.</p> <p>He explained that the process review is still underway as part of the My Fenland work, and it is hoped that it may assist with some of the efficiencies in processes and enable the My Fenland Team to assist the validation team with tasks to make sure that the Planning Team are able to cope with fluctuations in demand for the service.</p>

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				<p>Nick Harding gave an update with regard to planning performance and added that:</p> <p>92% of applications for majors are being determined on time, including where extensions of time are included. 72% of minor applications 85% of other applications</p> <p>He explained that if extension of times were not included,</p> <p>25% of major planning applications would be determined on time. 31% of minor applications on time 64% other applications on time</p> <p>Nick Harding stated that the figures demonstrate the level of use that is made with extensions of time. He reiterated the point made by David Rowen at the last meeting where he had explained that we do not ask for extensions of time where the delay is solely down to the fault of the planning service.</p> <p>Nick Harding stated that with regards to condition of discharge applications:</p> <p>70% of condition of discharge applications are decided on time or within a timeframe agreed through an extension of time agreement with the applicant.</p> <p>Nick Harding gave an update on staffing matters and an updated staffing list would be circulated.</p> <p>He explained that agency cover is being explored</p>

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				<p>for the Development Management Service to fill the vacant gaps.</p> <p>John Maxey asked for there to be consistency amongst Planning Officers as there is evidence that where a case changes from one case officer to another the new case officer is raising new / different matters . Nick Harding stated that he has made it clear to officers that where there is clear evidence that where there is an aspect or all aspects of a submitted application is satisfactory, the new case officer should not be taking a different professional opinion on that case. He explained that the exception to that would be where it is apparent that the original case officer made a significant error that cannot be overlooked.</p>
34	<u>Any other business</u>			<p>Nick Harding asked for agenda items for the next meeting to be submitted.</p> <p>John Maxey asked for something on Biodiversity Net Gain to be an agenda item for the next meeting including how it is measured.</p> <p>The biodiversity tool kit</p> <p>Biodiversity metric: calculate the biodiversity net gain of a project or development - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p> <p>And Small Site Metric The Small Sites Metric - JP040 (nepubprod.appspot.com)</p>

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				<p data-bbox="1442 140 2112 209">Biodiversity Net Gain FAQs - Frequently Asked Questions Local Government Association</p> <p data-bbox="1442 288 2107 395">Nick Harding agreed to arrange for the ecology officer to attend the next meeting to do a short presentation.</p> <p data-bbox="1442 437 2152 1390">John Maxey added that it would be useful to know where developers should be looking for the targets that are being looked for at a specific site to try and provide. He added that if there is going to be an off-site contribution basis, it would be very useful to know how that will be operated. Nick Harding stated that currently there are no locations which have been brought forward, which could be where any developer contributions for net gain could be spent, the option is for on site delivery. He explained that on site delivery can be looked at in two ways, firstly the assets that fall within the particular site and whether any of the assets can be enhanced in order to provide the net gain and the alternative is to look at it from the concept of priority species that we have improving the lot of and work it on that basis. Nick Harding explained that a great deal depends on the nature of the development, scale and the opportunities that arise on the site. He added that if the particular development site is one which is devoid of biodiversity, achieving a small percentage is relatively straight forward and the challenge will be if the development site is of a more substantial nature and achieves a higher score in the first place.</p> <p data-bbox="1442 1433 2141 1501">David Thomas made reference to the Local Plan and he expressed the view that it appears to be a</p>

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				<p>missed opportunity that there is nothing within the plan that suggests that there is an area set aside such as a public park or wildlife forest that could be supported and if someone was prepared to develop it they could then take money in increments off developers to develop it into something of substantial gain and value to the whole community rather than just someone planting a singular tree in their garden. Nick Harding stated that contained within the Annual Monitoring report of the Council in relation to planning matters, it explains what the status of qualifying nature sites is with regards to whether they are deteriorating in terms of quality, staying the same or improving. He added that in relation to those, there is that opportunity to improve one of more of those so that there is clearly a designated site and therefore its ongoing management is important, but there needs to be assurances that there is an element of public benefit and that will include ensuring that there is public access to a particular site and whether increased public access is appropriate given the qualities of that particular site.</p> <p>Nick Harding stated that in terms of the waterways there is the potential opportunity for biodiversity enhancements which could potentially be funded through the off-setting process. David Thomas said that it would be one area and there is a strong link between the environment and water and the potential gains that can be obtained from biodiversity by putting water and set aside land together. He referred to the development by the March bypass and the balancing pond beyond that and added that there had been talks previously with regard to the inclusion of a country</p>

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				<p>park and he questioned whether those concepts had been developed given that there is a potential funding source available for delivering them which is the 10% net biodiversity gain which wasn't in place previously. Nick Harding stated that he is not aware of any detailed work which has been carried out, but he agreed it maybe something that needs to be looked into further.</p> <p>Councillor Sutton asked whether the monies would go to a central Fenland fund, where potential bidders can bid into, or would it be a fund specific to the area where it was built. Nick Harding explained that no decisions have been made to date as to how the process would work and in his opinion he think that it would be advantageous to invite organisations or land owners to present a proposal to the Council and a list of projects for the enhancement of their particular sites and then the Council would be a position to accept biodiversity offsetting contributions, the money could then be allocated to specific projects which have gone through the approval process.</p> <p>The dates of the meetings going forward</p> <p>13 July 2022 26 October 2022 25 January 2023 12 April 2023</p>

Finish: Time Not Specified