

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK**REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL**

Minutes from the Meeting of the Regeneration and Development Panel held on Tuesday, 31st March, 2026 at 6.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn PE30 5DQ

PRESENT: Councillors Bland, Blunt, Bone, Bubb, Collingham, Colwell, Crofts, Osborne (Vice Chair), Parish (Chair) and Ryves (substitute for Councillor Anota)

PORTFOLIO HOLDERS:

Councillor Beales – Leader of the Council
Councillor Lintern – Portfolio Holder for Culture and Events
Councillor Moriarty – Portfolio Holder for Planning and Licensing (remotely)
Councillor Ring – Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Business
Councillor Rust – Portfolio Holder for People and Communities

OFFICERS:

James Arrandale – Principal Lawyer (remotely)
Duncan Hall – Assistant Director for Regeneration, Housing and Place
Mark Whitmore – Assistant Director for Health, Wellbeing and Public Protection
Michael Burton – Principal Planner
Jemma Curtis – Regeneration Programmes Manager
Robin Lewis – Project Officer
James Grant – Principal Project Manager
Michelle Drewery – Deputy Chief Executive and S151 Officer
Connor Smalls – Regeneration Programmes Officer (remotely)

RD90: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Anota, Hodson and Ratcliffe.

RD91: MINUTES

RESOLVED: The minutes from the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

RD92: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

RD93: URGENT BUSINESS

There was none.

RD94: MEMBERS PRESENT PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 34

Councillor de Whalley was present under Standing Order 34.

RD95: **CHAIR'S CORRESPONDENCE**

The Chair reported that limited email correspondence had been shared with Panel Members.

RD96: **CABINET REPORT - LOCAL PLAN TASK GROUP - TERMS OF REFERENCE**

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The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Licensing presented the report proposing updated terms of reference for the Local Plan Task Group, reflecting new government requirements, statutory changes, and the need for a more agile approach to plan-making.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Licensing and officers for the report and invited questions and comments from the Panel as summarised below.

The Chair expressed concern that the Local Plan Task Group had not been consulted on the proposed changes to the terms of reference and sought confirmation that the plan remained the Council's plan. The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Licensing confirmed it was still the Council's plan but noted that statutory deadlines and the risk of government intervention limited councillors' influence, requiring more frequent meetings and quicker decision-making.

Councillor Crofts asked about the implications of removing the statutory duty to cooperate. The Principal Planner explained that although the legal requirement had been removed, practical cooperation with neighbouring authorities was still necessary, statutory consultees still had to be engaged, and the need to demonstrate compliance to a planning inspector was now less stringent.

In response to a question from Councillor Blunt, the Principal Planner explained the new terms of reference would be flexible and dynamic to accommodate future changes such as the introduction of the mayoral authority.

In response to a question from Councillor Ryves, the Principal Planner confirmed that the plan would take account of the Environment Agency's suggested policy on wastewater treatment.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Licensing clarified that the terms of reference had been drafted for the current circumstances and that

the new Local Plan would be adopted by the new Unitary Council, not the existing Council.

In response to a question from Councillor Bone, the Principal Planner confirmed that they would be working closely with Breckland and other neighbouring authorities throughout the process.

Councillor Bubb asked whether the new plan was expected to improve and enhance the existing plan. The Principal Planner confirmed that it would replace the current Local Plan.

In response to concerns raised by the Chair, the Principal Planner and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Licensing explained they were constrained by statutory deadlines and clarified that Councillors' views should not be ignored but government intervention and national policies may override local preferences requiring councillors to work smarter and to act quickly to influence the plan.

RESOLVED: That the Regeneration and Development Panel support the recommendation to Cabinet, as set out below.

Cabinet resolves:

To adopt the revised Local Plan Task Group Terms of Reference (Annex 1 to the report).

RD97: **CABINET REPORT - HIGH STREET RENTAL AUCTION**

[Click here to view the recording of this item on YouTube](#)

The Portfolio Holder for People and Communities presented the report on High Street rental auctions and empty property initiatives, outlining the links between tackling empty retail and residential properties, the funding arrangements, and the operational approach.

The Assistant Director for Health, Wellbeing and Public Protection advised the Panel that the report related specifically to the High Street Rental Auction scheme, and that the empty property post was already underway and would be advertised shortly.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder for People and Communities and officers for the report and invited questions and comments from the Panel as summarised below.

Councillor Ryves asked why empty retail and residential property policies were linked. The Assistant Director for Health, Wellbeing and Public Protection, and the Regeneration Programmes Manager explained that both types of vacancies negatively affected the town's economic vitality and public perception, and that combining efforts

would achieve a broader impact, including opportunities to repurpose space above shops for residential use.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Regeneration and Programmes Manager confirmed that funding from the Pride in Place programme and other partners would be available.

Councillor Bone commented that converting some empty properties to residential use made sense and stated that he welcomed the scheme.

In response to comments from Councillor Crofts, the Portfolio Holder for People and Communities explained that making empty residential properties and flats above shops habitable would help bring more people into the town to support local businesses and highlighted how the two approaches complemented each other.

In response to a question from Councillor Colwell, the Regeneration and Programmes Manager advised that they would provide the most up-to-date figures on void retail properties in the designated High Street rental auction area, using the quarterly survey data, after the meeting.

Councillor Collingham commented that it was disappointing the Debenhams site was excluded from the auction process. The Regeneration and Programmes Manager explained that the site's condition exceeded the reasonable standard required by legislation and added that alternative master planning and grant funding options were being explored for the property.

In response to comments from Councillor Ryves, the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Business explained that the auction process allowed flexible rental rates, enabling new businesses to trial premises at low cost.

In response to a question from Councillor Bubb, the Assistant Director for Health, Wellbeing and Public Protection explained that several options existed for bringing empty domestic properties back into use, including Empty Dwelling Management Orders, which enabled the authority to take over management and recover costs through rent, and enforced sale where appropriate. It was explained that the Pride in Place programme would also explore the potential for a loan scheme to help landlords bring properties up to a standard where they can be let, subject to a future business case. The Assistant Director for Health, Wellbeing and Public Protection emphasised the need to understand why properties remained empty and to work with owners to address barriers or support the sale of properties to others able to bring them back into use.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Assistant Director for Health, Wellbeing and Public Protection clarified that while the current focus was on King's Lynn due to high need and funding alignment,

there was potential for the empty property officer's work to be extended across the borough as data on vacancies was available.

The Chair commented that it would be good to have the work extended for empty residential properties outside of King's Lynn.

RESOLVED: That the Regeneration and Development Panel support the recommendation to Cabinet, as set out below.

Cabinet to note the content of the report and agree to implement a High Street Rental Auction Scheme subject to following the national guidance in implementing such a scheme, to initially be applied to the southern section of King's Lynn High Street (appendix 1).

RD98: **GUILDHALL UPDATE**

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The Project Officer provided an update on the Guildhall project which covered construction progress, funding status, stakeholder engagement, fundraising efforts, business plan development and outreach activities.

The Chair thanked the Project Officer for the report and presentation and invited questions and comments from the Panel as summarised below.

In response to questions from the Chair, the Project Officer confirmed that Tim FitzHigham had overall responsibility for fundraising. The CIO played a key role in accessing specialist funding streams unavailable to the Borough. The Project Officer explained Tim FitzHigham led the mixed-model fundraising approach planned for the coming years, and that the fundraising consultant worked under his direction, with their time allocated according to agreed priorities. The Project Officer clarified that the strategy set out the CIO's ability to attract both capital funding for construction and revenue funding for long-term operations. They were key to accessing funding streams that the Borough could not apply to directly.

In response to a question from Councillor Colwell, the Project Officer explained operational risks such as water leaks and global events affecting materials and costs were being managed with insurance claims and built-in contingencies and the project team were tracking costs and risks closely, with no current impact on budget or timeline.

Councillor Bubb asked what plans were in place to promote that Shakespeare was in King's Lynn. The Project Officer confirmed efforts to promote the Guildhall's Shakespeare connection was ongoing, including partnerships with national Shakespeare organisations and outreach to schools and libraries. Officers were working to ensure the

message peaks at the right time and to book significant touring companies well in advance.

Councillor Ryves asked whether the business plan was being continuously kept under review. The Project Officer confirmed the business plan was under continuous review, led by the new Assistant Director for Culture and Leisure, and that their responsibility is to ensure the plan is fit for purpose and responsive to changing demographics and market conditions, with a focus on multiple income streams and operational durability.

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Business commented that this was a major project managed by several officers and highlighted that, although a fundraising team was now in place, Tim FitzHigham had undertaken significant work promoting the project internationally. The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Business emphasised that raising substantial funds was a long-term process.

The Portfolio Holder for Culture and Events reminded the Panel that outreach and education work had continued across the borough during the construction period, including activity in schools and libraries to maintain engagement with young people. The Panel were also reminded that the project covered the wider Guildhall complex, including galleries, the café and the restaurant, and that significant ongoing outreach activity supported the overall programme.

The Chair proposed that the panel receive updates every six months, focusing on financing, technical issues, and preparations for the opening, to ensure ongoing transparency and oversight.

RESOLVED: That the Regeneration and Development Panel acknowledge the update and receive updates every six months focusing on financing, technical issues, and preparations for the opening.

RD99: **WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD DECISION LIST**

RESOLVED: The Panel's Work Programme and the Forward Decisions List was noted.

RD100: **DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Regeneration and Development Panel was scheduled to take place on 2nd June 2026 at 6.00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn.

RD101: **CABINET REPORT - CUSTOM HOUSE REFURBISHMENT**

[Click here to view the recording of this item on YouTube](#)

The Assistant Director for Regeneration, Housing and Place presented the report on Custom House refurbishment as included in the Agenda.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director for Regeneration, Housing and Place for the report and invited questions and comments from the Panel as summarised below.

Councillor Colwell raised concerns about the condition of Hanse House, noting that the Grade I listed building was affected by UPVC banners and bins. Councillor Colwell felt this was inappropriate and suggested that the owners should be engaged to ensure the area supported the wider ambitions for an improved waterfront. The Assistant Director for Regeneration, Housing and Place confirmed he would speak with Councillor Colwell outside the meeting regarding the points raised.

The Panel agreed to move into closed session to consider the exempt sections of the report.

RD102: **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED: That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

RD103: **EXEMPT - CABINET REPORT - CUSTOM HOUSE REFURBISHMENT**

The Assistant Director for Regeneration, Housing and Place responded to questions from Members relating to the exempt information contained within the report.

RESOLVED: That the Regeneration and Development Panel support the recommendations to Cabinet as set out below.

Cabinet resolves:

1. To proceed with the Custom House element of the Riverfront Regeneration project based on the RIBA Stage 4 design.
2. Delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Regeneration, Housing and Place to award the contract to deliver the Custom House Project ("the Main Contract") to the successful tenderer, as identified through the completed procurement process within the approved budget as authorised.
3. Delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Regeneration, Housing and Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to

approve material changes to the scope of the project and/or variations to the Main Contract that are within the approved budget and in accordance with the Local Assurance Framework for this project.

Councillor Crofts left the meeting.

RD104: **EXEMPT - SOUTHEND ROAD - POST PROJECT EVALUATION**

The Principal Project Manager presented the report as included in the Agenda.

The Principal Project Manager gave a presentation on Southend Road Post Project Evaluation as included in the Agenda.

The Panel asked questions to which the Principal Project Manager responded.

RESOLVED: That the Regeneration and Development Panel formally promotes the findings of this review and ensures the institutional knowledge gained from the Southend Road project is systematically embedded into all future project management processes.

The meeting closed at 8.18 pm