

## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET ON 8 FEBRUARY 2023 TO COUNCIL ON 23 FEBRUARY 2023

### CAB129 HUNSTANTON MULTI USER HUB AND TRANSPORT INTERCHANGE

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R Eacott, Interim Project Delivery and Technical Advisor presented the report which explained that a planning application to build 47 apartments on land off Westgate, Hunstanton, with retail units, a new library and adult education facility, was approved in March 2021.

Work to develop this proposal, which would have provided a significant number of new homes for the town on a challenging site, was supported with a grant from Homes England. Around £800,000 was spent on this work, which was significantly less than the £1.5million that would be normal for a scheme of this size (figure based on 15% of a £10.4m scheme).

At the time that the planning application was submitted, Document B (Fire Safety) Volume 1, stipulated a height threshold of 30m before residential buildings required sprinklers. The proposed building would have been below this height. However, changes to Building Regulations (Approved Document B, Volume 11) were published in May 2020, taking effect from November 2020; the revised guidance stated that blocks of flats over 11m height should be provided with sprinklers. The top floor of the proposed unit was over 11m.

At the time, officers felt that it would be possible to proceed with the application and seek a way to resolve the sprinkler issue retrospectively.

However, a month after permission was granted, further regulatory changes – this time to fire standards – were announced.

This, combined with unforeseen rises in construction costs following the Covid-19 pandemic, and more recently forecast falling house prices, has had a material impact on the financial viability of this scheme, and to other Borough Council Major Housing Projects within the Capital Programme.

Officers had therefore been considering alternative options for the site. Matters of note have influenced that thinking:

1. A Neighbourhood Plan for Hunstanton was adopted in June 2022. This plan identified the designation of the site in the Neighbourhood Plan (Policy M3: Protection of Local Community Facilities).
2. The County Council had indicated funding was available that could be used to support a plan to invest in an improved library / adult education facility (with toilets and a changing place facility), along with investment in an improved bus station and creating an Active Travel Hub.
3. The impact of financial viability of the housing development on the overall Accelerated Construction Programme (ACP).

Having reached the conclusion that the site had become unviable for a variety of reasons as a location for housing, the availability of other government grant for

transport, and NCC prepared to fund their own library and to invest in the site as an Active Travel Hub, officers instead recommended that the Council pursues this option.

Under standing order 34, Councillor de Whalley confirmed that Hunstanton was in need of investment and this would help to redress the balance.

Under standing order 34, Councillor Parish confirmed he was not against this proposal but suggested that Heacham library be funded by the County Council.

Under standing order 34, Councillor Joyce made comments about west Norfolk not previously getting County Council funding.

Under standing order 34, Councillor Dickinson asked if it was being done with existing planning permission or new and the timescale proposed.

It was confirmed that a new planning application would be required on the same footprint, and with changes to the layout of the bus station. It was hoped to start in 2023.

Councillor Blunt expressed disappointment that the original plan was not viable, but embraced the amended proposals which were a sign of better working relationships with the County Council. He hoped it could be delivered swiftly.

Councillor Middleton expressed disappointment that the original proposal wasn't viable but confirmed that following the changes in legislation and viability it was right to move to another option. In response to comments made, he drew attention to the level of grant and spend in west Norfolk by the County Council in recent times. The proposal would bring much needed resources to Hunstanton.

In summing up Councillor Dark confirmed it was disappointing that the original proposal changed, but welcomed the new proposals. He explained that the bid was in the clean and active travel work which wasn't available in the original stage. He acknowledged that the investing West Norfolk was due to hard work and relationship building.

**RECOMMENDED:**

- 1) The Council will not proceed with housing on the bus station site in view of external factors affecting the viability of the scheme and the opportunity to pursue a viable alternative, and will remove the project from the Capital Programme;
- 2) NCC will continue to proceed with the improved library / adult education facility (including the library, toilets, and changing places toilet) on the site enabled with the addition of land owned by the Borough which will include the provision of an area for West Norfolk tourism information (subject to further negotiation);
- 3) NCC will proceed with the Bus Back Better Grant to improve coastal travel, cycle facilities and sustainability, invest to improve the bus station as a transport interchange and to agree terms with Borough Council for the land;

- 4) The Borough Council, supported by Norfolk County Council, to negotiate with Homes England in respect of the ACP funding originally allocated to development of this site.
- 5) The Borough Council will work with all parties on developing a joint strategic approach to regeneration and growth in the wider Hunstanton area through an agreed Masterplan;
- 6) That the Assistant Director for Property and Projects, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Property and Finance, S151 officer and Monitoring Officer be given delegated authority to finalise the legal arrangements for the land.

#### Reasons for Decision

To deliver on the Council's corporate objectives, in partnership with Norfolk County Council, to:

- Protect and enhance the environment, including tackling climate change; delivering on the Council's commitment to be carbon neutral by 2035; and
- Create and maintain good quality places that make a difference to people's lives.

### CAB130 **OFFICER DELEGATED DECISIONS - CALL IN**

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The Monitoring Officer presented a report which explained that the ability for Overview & Scrutiny Panels to call in decisions of the Executive was required by legislation, but the detail of the procedure for call-in was a locally determined matter for each Council. This Council's constitution did not list officer delegated decisions as decisions that could be called-in. It was recommended that they should be added to this list and Standing Orders duly amended.

Under standing order 34 Councillors Joyce and Parish commended the move.

Councillor Dark questioned the arrangements for urgent matters, to which it was confirmed that there was provision in legislation for urgent items to be dealt with.

**RECOMMENDED:** That Standing Orders 12 and 30 be amended as set out in this report to enable Officer's decisions to be subject to call in.

#### **Reason for Decision**

To ensure the Council's call-in procedure aligns with legislative requirements and best practice.

### CAB132 **COUNCIL MEETING ARRANGEMENTS**

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The Chief Executive presented a report on the Member input into the consideration of council meeting arrangements following the Notice of Motion to Council. It was agreed at Corporate Performance Panel on 13 April 2022 to establish an Informal

Working Group (IWG) for evidence gathering and preliminary analysis. The IWG met on 6 June 2022 and 4 July 2022 and the findings of the IWG were reported to CPP on 4 January 2023.

The recommendations from the CPP meeting were to maintain the status quo on meetings timings.

Councillor Dark suggested that for the remainder of the Municipal year the meetings remain the same, but then should members in the new administration wish to re-visit the timings they would be able to do so.

Under standing order 34 Councillor de Whalley supported the statement.

Under standing order 34 Councillor Parish confirmed that he supported the suggestion.

Under standing order 34 Councillor Joyce confirmed he had asked the Labour Group's opinion and they had all confirmed they preferred the 4.30pm start times rather than later start times. He referred to the 24hr work carried out by shift workers etc so 9-5 was not always the norm. He also drew attention to the fact that a good employer should give time off for Councillor work.

Councillor Middleton drew attention to the fact that councillors were allocated allowances which should compensate for a small amount of loss of earnings. He referred to the County Council and Breckland Councils whose meetings were at 10am. He supported no change prior to the elections.

Councillor Dark was heartened by the pragmatism shown for the status quo up to the elections, as he felt that with the important decisions having to be made it was not appropriate to spend time on this subject of start times.

**RECOMMENDED:** That the arrangements for council meetings as detailed in section 2 of the report continue and should members wish to change this after the election, Council reconsider the timings.

### **Reason for Decision**

To respond to the Motion to Council on 23 February 2022 and the arrangements for council meetings as covid restrictions are removed