

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

30 March 2023

COUNCILLOR ADRIAN LAWRENCE - CABINET MEMBER FOR PROPERTY

For the period February to March 2023

Progress on Portfolio Matters.

As this is my last report of the financial year I thought it might be good to summarise activities, and highlights, from the past twelve months, or so, for Council colleagues

Staffing Resources :

Over the past year we have managed to stabilise the staffing resource within the Property & Projects team with a combination of : successful recruitment to the vacant Property Services Manager post, reorganisation and reallocation of certain duties, and the implementation of a programme of employing Higher Level Apprentices. I am particularly pleased with the apprentice programme as this provides significant opportunity for mainly local individuals to achieve not only on-the-job training, but also high-quality professional qualifications. This fits in really well with our aims to raise aspirations, and skills within our area.

Commercial Property :

The commercial property portfolio, and its management, probably does not get the attention it deserves. This portfolio contributes over £3 million of revenue every year that supports the Council's budgets and helps us in our ambition to keep Council Tax levels as low as possible. This portfolio provides premises to local small and medium sized businesses, that may not be of interest to larger institutional investors (as they are more management intensive), however, these types of businesses are critically important to the local economy.

As stated in previous reports, this portfolio, particularly the light industrial elements, has performed extremely well during the past twelve months, or so, and should continue to do so.

Community Related Issues :

We have been very conscious of the cost-of-living issues facing many of our residents. The Property & Projects team were tasked with adapting and refurbishing one of our vacant premises (held for future regeneration initiatives) to facilitate the delivery of a community shop, and the premises at

the Southgates roundabout were duly delivered in early December 2022. The Council is working with a service provider to operate this facility, and I am hoping this facility will be operational by the date of this Council meeting.

The team has also been working with representatives of the Gaywood Community Centre, and the local Ward Member, and has regularised the group's use of the adjacent park land for periodic car boot sales. These events not only help to support the other activities of the Community Centre, but also provide an opportunity for community social interaction. We will continue working with the community centre operators, and there is an on-going dialogue in respect of the ownership of the centre itself, and I will present a report to Cabinet colleagues in due course in respect of this matter.

With regard to another community centre, during the year we have also successfully completed the transfer of the Hunstanton centre to Hunstanton Town Council. We hope that the Town Council can now make this a thriving community facility for local residents.

We have also successfully invested in another important community (and visitor) facility in Hunstanton with the replacement of the roof at the Princess Theatre. The team worked well with the contractor, and the theatre tenants, to ensure that the works were undertaken, not only within budget, but also so as not to affect the important Pantomime season, a key trading activity for the theatre which helps to support its on-going viability.

The team is also currently working on finding a solution to some localised flooding issues that are affecting the Upwell Community car park near to the Doctor's Surgery on Townley Close. The team is working with the local Borough and Parish Councillors, as well as the local Internal Drainage Board, and adjacent landowners. I have been informed that there are solutions, and it may be that the Council will need to help facilitate these, to ensure that the car park is more usable, particularly during the winter months. I should receive a report on these issues soon.

Nar Ouse Regeneration Area :

The Nar Ouse Regeneration Area is in the process of taking a significant step-forward following the Council's decision to invest in the road and utility infrastructure, and in the development of some commercial units that will be held by the Council as part of its commercial property portfolio. The road and utility infrastructure should be completed in October this year and this will provide investment opportunities to businesses wishing to construct premises for themselves, as well as the opportunity for the Council to generate capital receipts from land sales. With regard to land sales, councillors will note that I presented a report to Cabinet this month for a sale of land at the Nar Ouse site that, if the proposed development is forthcoming, could provide extensive benefits to our residents in and around King's Lynn. The report was "Exempt" owing to its commercial sensitivity, however all councillors have access to this information via the usual channels should they wish to read this report, and particularly the appendices attached.

Riverfront Regeneration Area :

The Property & Projects team, together with the Regeneration Team, managed to pull together a concept design and costed Business Case for proposals to be presented to the Town Deal Board, and managed to secure approximately £4 million of Town Deal Funding for proposals relating to the Custom House, King Staithe Square, and part of the former Banks Cargill Grain Silo site near to the Millfleet. This was a significant achievement as the team essentially started with a blank-sheet-of paper in April 2022, and following production of various design concepts, consultation with various statutory bodies, Council Panels, Town Deal Boards and an engagement event with local residents presented proposals for approval to Cabinet and the Town Deal Board in September/October of the same year. The team is now going through the process of appointing a design team to take this project through the next design phase and then through to delivery.

Linking in to the above the Property & Projects team has also been progressing the demolition works and external fabric refurbishment works to the former Sommerfeld & Thomas warehouse on the South Quay. These works are nearing completion and have gone well.

The Sommerfeld & Thomas site was marketed last year, and the team is working with an interested party in respect of development proposals and disposal options for the site. These discussions are on-going, and a report will be brought to Cabinet in a few months' time.

King's Lynn Innovation Centre (KLIC) :

As this report is mainly a look-back at some of the highlights of the past financial year I obviously need to mention the KLIC building. Early last autumn we achieved what many thought could not be achieved – we secured all of the money owed to the Council relating to the delivery of the King's Lynn Innovation Centre. We now own a fully occupied landmark building that provides high quality accommodation to numerous local businesses with the rental income stream contributing significantly to the Council's revenue budgets. The hard work put in by Members and Officers has turned this situation into a definite success story.

As this is my last report for this administration I would just like to thank my officer team for all their hard work and dedication over the last four years. I have never known so many problems to be thrown at us but everyone took things in their stride and carried on regardless.

Well done everybody.

Meetings Attended

Full Council
Cabinet Briefings
Portfolio Briefings