

Folkestone Town Centre Working Group

Held at:	Remote meeting - Zoom
Date	Wednesday, 13 July 2022
Present	Councillors David Monk, Tim Prater and Lesley Whybrow
Apologies for Absence	Councillor Laura Davison
Officers Present:	Katharine Harvey (Economic Development Advisor), Rod Lean (Chief Officer - Place & Growth), Sue Lewis (Case Officer (Committee)), Llywelyn Lloyd (Chief Planning Officer) and Lorraine Smith (Economic Development Senior Specialist)
Others Present:	William Beeston (We Made That) and Annabelle Precious (Civic Engineers)

6. Appoint a Chairman for the Meeting

Councillor David Monk was appointed Chairman for the meeting.

The Chairman asked members of the working group if they would be happy for him as Leader of the Council to amend the terms of reference of the Working Group to include the membership of the Ward Member for Folkestone Central, Councillor Danny Brook.

This was agreed.

7. Minutes and actions from last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2022 were agreed.

8. LUF bid update

Katharine Harvey, Chief Economic Development Officer provided the working group with an update on the council's round 2 LUF bid. A report was presented to Cabinet in June and at that time the LUF submission deadline was 6 July 2022.

Unfortunately, there has been a delay and the online portal for submissions is not yet open and has been delayed due to the political situation of new ministers in DLUHC.

The Council is ready to progress so once the portal has been opened for submissions officers will submit their application within the 2 week deadline.

The submission is now a single project called Folkestone – A Brighter Future, but has the same components as previously approved by Cabinet. It was felt that this would reduce give less scope for the Government to reduce the funding. The total project bid is for £21,990,910, with 10% coming from FHDC as the require match funding and £19,775,794 from LUF.

Annabelle Precious, Civic Engineers gave a short presentation to members providing insight into the following:

- Traffic Routing Strategy
- Proposed layout
- Examples of similar schemes
- New =bus layout strategy.

A plan of the existing layout, together with the new proposed layout showing the direction of traffic flow now and in the future was provided. The new plan avoids any reduction in parking but will create a slow speed environment that will benefit pedestrians and cyclists and create better green infrastructure.

The example of Oxford, which had a similar design to that proposed for Folkestone, was presented showing the before and after photographs.

The consultants have worked with Stagecoach, who are committed to the new plans, to ensure that all the bus routes in and out of the area work. There will be no change to the services currently provided and capacity to increase in the future is built into the proposals.

Members paid particular attention to the following:

- Walking Distances – concern that pedestrians will have to walk further to and from buses and toilet facilities. Assurance was given that this would not be the case and that the environment created will be more accessible and pedestrian-friendly.
- Space for bus movement – concern that there would not be enough space for the buses. It was confirmed that movements have been tracked by transport modelling software that allows officers to monitor size of vehicles, the routes they take and the amount of space required. Thetechnical assessment confirms that so enough space is provided.
- Welfare for drivers – this is incorporated in the design.
- Disabled facilities – need to ensure that these will be considered fully.
- Traffic control – the entrance and exit to Asda is tight so concern that there will be traffic congestion with the new design.

Ewan Green explained that the designs will evolve and continue to be refined but what was presented to members reflects the current position

9. **Folca 2**

Rod Lean, Chief Officer - Place & Growth informed the working group external property and commercial development advisors had been appointed to look at the viability options of the building either for redevelopment, build to rent/sell and refurbishment. Refurbishment appears to be the best way forward.

Prior to reporting back to Members in more detail Officers are considering the potential range of end uses for the building including:

- Leisure – as it stands there are a lack of a Leisure offer for families and residents , there is a need to draw people into the town and a good Leisure offer will help this .
- Retail – need to carefully look at types and brands that will complement the town and meet with local aspiration .
- Business/office space options – need to look at co-working spaces, new businesses, affordable costs and if the demand is there.

Rod Lean explained that consideration of the management operation of the building must be a factor moving forward, be it the Council or outsourcing to a management company with particular care being taken around the legalities and commercial benefits this might entail.

Officers have been liaising with operators/specialists on how a practical refurbishment can work, paying particular attention to who will be using the premises. Further information will be presented to the working group in due course.

LUF funds of £2.4M for Folca if successful will enable the first phase of refurbishment going forward. Officers will come back to the working group to discuss the finer details of what could be expected for the building.

Members paid particular attention to the following:

- Heritage – that officers seek to develop proposals that retain as much of the heritage aspects of the building e.g : the art deco frontage and the internal staircase, although it was noted that the staircase does take up valuable internal space.
- Outsourcing of management – look at all options carefully and potential to start inhouse to establish the new uses then outsource in future if the commercial case was strong. .

10. **Dates for next meeting**

The date for the next meeting will be circulated to members in due course.

11. **AOB**

1. Folca 1 update – the working group was informed that work to confirm the internal layout for the proposed new medical centre are being finalised with health partners. Following this more designs including external elevations will be brought to members for discussion. Councillor Whybrow asked that the public are made aware of the choices for the project.

Councillor Prater expressed his concern at the loss of heritage of the building.

It is intended that at the next meeting officers will be able to present more detailed drawings once the including elevations.

2. Store 21 update – the working group noted that the leaseholders are Asda.. East Kent Spatial Development Company are undertaking feasibility work at present to assess the potential to acquire and refurbish the property. .

A key consideration is the cost involved in taking on the freehold or leasehold, together with the costing and sources of funding for the required refurbishment.