

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of an informal meeting of the **District Executive** held as a **Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software on Thursday 9 June 2022.**

(9.30 am - 10.30 am)

Present:

Chairman: Peter Seib

Mike Best
John Clark
Nicola Clark
Adam Dance

Sarah Dyke
Peter Gubbins
Tony Lock



Also Present:

Brian Hamilton
Gina Seaton
Martin Wale

Colin Winder
Andy Kendall

Officers:

Jane Portman
Kirsty Larkins
Robert Orrett
Peter Paddon
Natalie Fortt
Stephanie Gold
Angela Cox
Becky Sanders

Chief Executive
Director (Service Delivery)
Commercial Property, Land & Development Manager
Acting Director (Place and Recovery)
Regeneration Programme Manager
Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)
Specialist (Democratic Services)
Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

Note: All decisions were approved without dissent unless shown otherwise.

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 12th May 2022 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

2. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jason Baker and Val Keitch.

3. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

Councillor Mike Best declared a personal interest in Agenda item 6: Millers Garage car park, Crewkerne as a member of Crewkerne Town Council.

4. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

The Chairman took Agenda item 5: Chairman's Announcements before Public Question Time. In view of the removal of Agenda item 6 from the agenda, he asked if the public speakers still wished to address the Committee. They confirmed that they did and the Committee were addressed by three local residents of Crewkerne regarding Millers Garage, Crewkerne. Their comments included:-

- The proposal for the car park would unlock the area of adjacent land for residential development and local residents had not been consulted on this. But it could be used as informal gardens or park, available for all in the town. There would be economic and social benefits to this.
 - The car park was urgently needed for the residents of East Street.
 - Ask that Members consider local residents views as highlighted by the recent change in government policy.
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5. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman varied the order of Agenda items and took Chairman's Announcements prior to Public Question Time.

He advised that following discussion with the Ward Members for Crewkerne it was apparent that the use of the land for housing had not been presented to the community through the Local Plan process, therefore a planning application should be submitted prior to any Council decision to change the Millers Garage car park project (Agenda item 6) and he proposed that the item be removed from the agenda. Officers would continue to negotiate to allow a planning application to be submitted.

Councillor Tony Lock, as Portfolio Holder for Protecting Core Services, stated that most of the comments raised by the Scrutiny Committee relating to Agenda item 6 (Millers Garage car park) were planning related. He advised Members against commenting on the report because of future implications of determining a planning application for the site.

Councillor Sue Osborne, as Vice-Chairman of Scrutiny Committee, said they had raised several concerns regarding the proposal for Millers Garage car park at their meeting.

The proposal to remove Agenda item 6, Millers Garage car park, Crewkerne was seconded and agreed by Members.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Chairman and Executive Councillors welcomed Councillor Nicola Clark to her first District Executive meeting as the newly appointed Portfolio Holder for Housing.

6. Millers Garage Car Park, Crewkerne (Agenda Item 6)

It was noted that this item had been withdrawn from the Agenda.

7. Yeovil Refresh Public Realm Change of Scope Request (Urgent Item) (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman noted that the report had been brought forward under Part 4 of the Council's Constitution: Access to Information Procedure Rules, Point 15: General Exception, and Point 16: Special Urgency.

The Portfolio Holder for Area South and the Yeovil Refresh thanked the officers for producing the report at very short notice. The report asked that the scope of the Yeovil Refresh be changed to enable all stages to be completed except for Wyndham Street. There was a need for urgent action due to constant price inflation and the works to Wyndham Street would only be paused. He asked that Members accept the proposal.

The Regeneration Programme Manager said the construction industry was experiencing high levels of inflation caused by many factors. The pre-tender estimates were based on prices in September 2021 which had subsequently increased, and it was no longer possible to complete all areas of the public realm within the agreed budget. The Programme Board had concluded that in order to secure the project, it must either be reduced in scope or they submit a request for additional funding from the corporate contingency fund. They had concluded to reduce the scope of the project to allow two remaining contracts to be signed. This would also allow some work on the issues encountered in the Wyndham Street proposals to be re-worked and a report would be presented to District Executive in August on these proposals.

In response to questions from Members, the Regeneration Programme Manager and the Acting Director for Place and Recovery advised:-

- There were a number of highway related issues in Wyndham Street and contract negotiation had not yet taken place so it was possible some costs may be reduced, therefore a request for funding from the corporate contingency fund was not felt appropriate at that point.
- At the current moment further work was required to specify the funding required to complete the works in Wyndham Street and a report to clarify this would be presented to the Executive in August 2022.

In response to questions from the Scrutiny Committee, the Regeneration Programme Manager and the Acting Director for Place and Recovery advised:-

- The impact of delaying the works in Wyndham Street would be minimal as they were scheduled for a later phase.
- The corporate contingency fund was available as a source of funding and there were Section 106 contributions tied to the Wyndham Street area. Officers would continue to seek other sources of funding as well.
- There would always be a risk that costs would escalate for the phases 1 – 4 as contractors said the price of steel was rising but signing the contracts would give the contractors confidence to order materials.
- Due diligence was undertaken on all significant contracts as standard and the procurement team received a weekly update on the state of the significant suppliers. In addition the regeneration project accountant had undertaken a thorough analysis of the preferred contractors finances and had produced report to confirm they were solvent and sound. This was no guarantee of failure as they were national companies but due diligence had been done.

The Vice Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee thanked the Regeneration Programme Manager for answering their questions. She concluded that one member had expressed concern with the urgent request, but had concluded that it was sensible to finish as much of the refresh work as possible within the current budget.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development said it was important that the Wyndham Street part of the project was completed with possible funding from the corporate contingency fund and he welcomed the report to be presented at the August District Executive meeting.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members voiced their support for the project and for the completion of the Wyndham Street part of the project at a later stage. The recommendations were proposed and seconded and unanimously agreed by Members.

RESOLVED: That District Executive recommend that the Chief Executive agree to reallocate the £769,000 funding currently earmarked for Wyndham Street to the completion of Westminster Street North (Phase 2), Middle Street (and adjoining streets), High Street and The Borough, Yeovil within the Yeovil Refresh public realm budget.

Reason: To agree to a change of scope to the public realm workstream of the Yeovil Refresh project in order to remain within the overall approved project budget.

8. District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 8)

The Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee said they had sought and received clarification on the Discretionary Energy Support Scheme and she offered Scrutiny assistance to help to review the scheme.

The following amendments to the Forward Plan were noted:

- Phosphates update – moved to August 2022
- Addition of a report - Changes to Financial Procedure Rules - Full Council - July 2022.
- Addition of a report - Yeovil Refresh - August 2022

RESOLVED: That the District Executive recommend that the Chief Executive:-

1. approve the updated Executive Forward Plan for publication as attached at Appendix A, with the following amendment;
 - Phosphates update – moved to August 2022
 - Addition of a report - Changes to Financial Procedure Rules - Full Council - July 2022.
 - Addition of a report - Yeovil Refresh - August 2022

Reason: The Forward Plan is a statutory document.

9. Date of next Meeting (Agenda Item 9)

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the District Executive would take place on Thursday 7th July 2022 as a virtual informal meeting using Zoom meeting software commencing at 9.30 a.m.

10. Exclusion of Press and Public (Agenda Item 10)

The Chairman asked Members to agree that the press and public be excluded from the following item and this was agreed without dissent.

RESOLVED: That the following item be considered in Closed Session by virtue of the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A under Paragraph 3: Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

11. Briefing on Local Government Reorganisation (Confidential) (Agenda Item 11)

The Chief Executive provided members with a brief verbal update on the progress of Local Government Reorganisation in Somerset and answered their questions on points of clarification.

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Chairman

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Date