

BROADLAND ECONOMIC SUCCESS POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Broadland Economic Success Policy Development Panel of Broadland District Council, held on Thursday, 19 October 2023 at 6.00 pm.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: A Tipple (Chairman), J Harvey (Vice-Chair), P Auber, F Bowe, S Catchpole and J Copplestone

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: J Bailey, A Crotch, S Jones, L Starling and K Vincent

Substitute: Councillors: P Berry (In place of A Crotch) and J Emsell (In place of S Jones)

Cabinet Member in Attendance: Councillor: M Booth

Officers in Attendance: G Denton (Assistant Director of Economic Growth), A Sommazzi (Clean Growth and Sustainability Manager) and C White (Democratic Services Manager)

Also in Attendance:

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J Bailey, A Crotch, S Jones, L Starling, and K Vincent.

14. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Economic Success Policy Development Panel held on 7 November 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

Minute No: 10 – Rural England Prosperity Fund

A member reminded the Panel that an additional recommendation had been added to the report, which proposed a midpoint update on the Rural Business Builder Capital Fund to come back to the Economic Success Policy Development Panel for oversight.

In response, the Assistant Director for Economic Growth confirmed that a report would be brought to the Panel in due course.

The same member also noted that a potential project listed in the Rural England Prosperity Fund report was for purchasing processing equipment for the Broadland Food Innovation Centre to help enhance the processing capability of this sector and she asked what progress had been made with this. She also noted that at the same meeting several members had requested an update on the position of the Food Innovation Centre for the Panel.

In respect of the processing equipment, the Assistant Director for Economic Growth advised the meeting that this would be subject to a business case that would be brought to members in due course. Members were also advised that a review of the Food Innovation Centre and was being scoped out for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Chairman advised members that he would discuss this matter further with the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

15. BROADLAND COUNTRY PARK: VISITOR FACILITY CONCEPT AND DESIGN

The Clean Growth and Sustainability Manager introduced the report, which sought approval to develop existing concept designs for a visitor kiosk and supporting facilities at Broadland Country Park. The project would require developing detailed funding options, costed designs, a procurement strategy, and submission of a supplementary planning application.

Members were reminded that Broadland Country Park comprised 57 hectares of Council owned land and 19 hectares of leased land.

The site had been acquired as part of the Council's requirement to deliver 'Sustainable Alternative Natural Greenspaces', to mitigate against the impacts of recreational disturbance by visitors to Special Protection Areas. However, it had been recognised that Broadland Country Park could go beyond this statutory requirement, and that it represented a unique opportunity to develop the natural resources on site to create a space that could foster local communities, grow a sense of place, support wellbeing and outdoor education, as well as enhancing and promoting biodiversity.

When purchasing the site, the following management objectives had been set out:

- Provide facilities that meet the needs of a range of different user groups.
- Encourage wider public awareness and use of Broadland Country Park.
- Improve access to and from Broadland Country Park.
- Enhance biodiversity.
- Develop long-term financial sustainability across Broadland Country Park.

Section 106 monies had also been allocated from nearby developments in Horsford, to support the delivery of key visitor infrastructure on the site. This included a surfaced circular walk, improved parking provision, play facilities, new walking routes, way-marking, interpretation, promotion, and marketing of the site. In addition, funding via the Business Rates Pool had been secured to compliment the onsite works.

A member noted that the report stated (on page 25 of the agenda) that the study should be read in conjunction with the Future Development Options and Financial Analysis document by Planning Solutions Consulting Ltd, which had not been provided to members. She added that an interim report from the consultants, which had been published in January 2023, had included several different options for the site which were also not included in the report, and neither was the overall cost of the project. She also had concerns about the size and location of the kiosk, which appeared to be sited on the leased land.

In response, the Clean Growth and Sustainability Manager advised that the kiosk would be situated on Council owned land and would be of modular design, so could be increased in size to meet demand and usage as required. It was emphasised that the report was seeking agreement to progress the first stage of the scheme, and this would be followed by detailed funding options, costed designs, a procurement strategy, and a supplementary planning application.

In answer to a query about the legal implications it was confirmed that the Council had an obligation to provide alternative recreational facilities to mitigate against the impact that residential development could have on Special Protection Areas, which were a network of sites of international importance for nature conservation. The provision of additional visitor facilities, such as toilets and a low-key catering option, would augment this offer.

A member suggested that the scheme did not seem ambitious enough and suggested that it should just be the start of the development of the Park.

In contrast, another member raised a concern about the environmental sustainability of the scheme and questioned if large numbers should be encouraged.

In response, the Clean Growth and Sustainability Manager emphasised that the Council was taking a very sensitive approach to the scheme and would ensure that environmentally important areas in the Park were protected. She added that although the facilities could be enlarged as needed, it was anticipated that the proposed kiosk would meet the current need. The proposed scheme prioritised catering facilities and toilets and other facilities such as educational spaces could be looked at if there was sufficient demand.

A member commended the proposal as a wonderful addition to a very attractive natural environment for residents and visitors to the District.

In respect of a query about stewardship schemes for parts of the Park the Clean Growth and Sustainability Manager advised the meeting that she understood that the grants for these areas had been rolled over. She also noted that there was an active volunteer group at the Park who invested a lot of time and effort into the site and the Council wished to provide an area which complemented the work that they undertook.

A member suggested that the proposed 80 space car park might not be sufficient and might result in visitors parking on the road. He suggested that bus companies might be approached to provide a service to the park.

In response, the Clean Growth and Sustainability Manager informed the meeting that an 80-space carpark had been deemed to be adequate at this stage and that there was also another carpark adjacent to the Country Park. She added that a balance was sought between visitor numbers and the impact on the environment and that the Council was trying to encourage access through public transport as well as pedestrians and cyclists.

In respect of materials, members were advised that the report was only setting out design concepts and materials would be agreed in detail at the next stage. It was stressed that the materials would be sustainable and locally sourced, where possible.

In respect of the toilets the Panel was informed that the configuration and equality issues would also be considered at the next stage. Regarding the additional £300,000 required for this project, members were advised that the funding might be accessed from a range of sources such as the Green Infrastructure Fund, the Greater Norwich Growth Board, and the Council's Environmental Project Reserve. It was emphasised that there would be no additional cost to progress to the technical design stage, including funding options, detailed costed designs, a procurement strategy and supplementary planning application.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development stressed that the Council would seek to progress the project via external funding and it was the intention to have a scheme that was ready to take forward when that funding became available.

It was noted that the land adjoining the Country Park, which would be an ideal site for a carpark, was in the ownership of three different landlords, which had made its acquisition difficult. The Council would, however, continue to explore options for this land.

In response to a query about the ongoing costs of the kiosk, members were advised that the facility would be leased to a third-party supplier, and it was estimated that it would generate rental income for the Country Park of between £6,500 and £9,000 per annum. Members were also advised that the Council had a policy of not charging for parking at its carparks.

In commending the project, a member also noted that the kiosk would go towards making the Park economically sustainable.

In summing up, the Chairman noted that the kiosk would be an asset to the Park that because of its modular design could be further developed as required.

It was unanimously

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

To

1. Endorse the existing concept design for a visitor kiosk at Broadland Country Park.

2. Agree to progress the existing plans at Broadland Country Park to technical design stage, including funding options, detailed costed designs, a procurement strategy and supplementary planning application.

(The meeting concluded at 7.10 pm)

Chairman