

SOHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Extra Ordinary Meeting (EOM) of Soham Town Council held via Zoom on Monday 12 October 2020.

Present: C Warner (Chairperson), P Lane, D Woricker, P Leonard, G Woodbridge, H Ross, G Dyer & Mesdames A Woricker, R Aitchison, E Johnston & A Pallett

PUBLIC COMMENT TIME

Prior to commencement the Clerk confirmed that there were no representations made by members of the Public

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS & PUBLIC

That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of matter 75.20 Strategic infrastructure & amenity improvements-review, make forward strategic and financial decisions in relation to the proposed financial offer from C&PCA for gross value added improvement in the town of Soham which is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that members of the public present during the item would be made aware of exempt information under Category 3 and 4 (commercially sensitive including legal privileged considerations) under Part I Schedule 1972 (AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) (EXEMPT INFORMATION) (ENGLAND) ORDER 2006)

75/20 Review and make forward strategic and financial decisions in relation to the proposed financial offer from Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (C&PCA) for gross value added improvements in the town of Soham (CHAIRMAN)

After significant debate and discussion by members & Clerk:

NOTED the potential financial offer from C&PCA was contingent on match funding by Soham Town Council which must be available (in its bank account/cleared funds-TBC) by January 2020 and before the meeting where their potential offer will be formally considered by the Combined Authority.

NOTED the report prepared by the Clerk and Chairman including those gross and social value added (GV & SVA) benefits and outcomes as well as risks associated with pursuing the proposed asset (building) acquisition.

NOTED the financial (capital and ongoing revenue) costs which may be placed on the Soham resident should the proposed asset (building) acquisition proceed.

NOTED those other related risks including public perception with pursuing the proposal of asset (building) acquisition

NOTED the limited timeframe in which to achieve the necessary level of information (due diligence), overview, scrutiny and public consultation required for the proposed project.

NOTED that currently Soham Town Council as a Local Authority is unable to exercise the General Power of Competence (GPC) due to insufficient numbers of elected member representatives and so any asset acquisition (purchase) occupation, use or disposal would need to proceed under current Powers contained in LGA 1972 Act.

UNDER THESE CONSIDERATIONS APPROVED BY MAJORITY- Delegation of Authority to the Chairman with assistance of interested members to pursue the possible purchase of a building with prominent High St presence contingent on:

- a) the engagement of a business consultant to generate a viable business (financial feasibility) plan of costings including any repairs

refurbishment costs together with projected/likely capital and debt repayments required.

- b) the preparation of a full survey and condition report of proposed building.
- c) Costs for those activities identified under a) and b) above of up to a maximum of £50 000 (fifty thousand pounds) subject to Soham Town Councils Financial Regulations to be paid from current reserves identified under 122/18 acknowledging that this is a sunk cost (not recoverable by the town council) should the decision to not proceed (where decision is to proceed these monies may be considered as contribution to the match funding element of application).

FURTHER APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY:

- d) Should the decision of C&PCA at its meeting in January 2020 not provide satisfactory or sufficient match funding then Soham Town Council will not be bound to proceed with proposed acquisition.

NOTED strong discussion and debate regarding the issue of current rate (precept) demand in terms of maintaining a constant charge for 2020-21¹, the likely burden of capitalisation and running costs including loan repayment and length of term of any debt and interest incurred should the acquisition project proceed and the current economic impact of COVID on residents (no formal decision taken, matter and approvals to be taken at subsequent full council meeting).

NOTED The condition, structural survey and QS (estimate costings) reports received in regards to the current state of the back hall of Pavilion (extension) which confirm that this annex has now an extremely limited lifespan (less than 2 years).

NOTED currently due to its known deterioration and COVID security issues the hall is no longer used/hired (used solely for minimal storage including food bank provisions)

UNDER THESE CONSIDERATIONS APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY:

- e) That the proposed acquisition of the asset (building) on the High St under approvals points a) to d) above remains independent to that of the long standing plans for new hall (back extension) to Pavilion and for which monies in reserves identified under 122/18 have already been made.
- f) Due to safety considerations not to continue to offer for public hire these facilities with immediate effect but to demolish the back hall (time frame next two years) to concrete base as part of the planning approvals using those ring fenced monies identified under 122/18 (less the £50K approved under c) above) ensuring that the tractor shed, current back exit to Pavilion, suitable accommodation for the groundsmen, the kitchen facilities and site security are maintained.
- g) Noted previous approval to submit plans to the Planning Authority but that any further actual build works including commencement of the proposed Phase II (new hall build) be deferred for future full council discussions and subsequent approvals (may be contingent/subject to those outcomes identified under 75/20 a)-d) above).

¹ Consideration of whether charge rates will be £ precept total or the £ Band D value paid by residents to be listed at its next scheduled meeting