

MINUTES of the meeting of Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee held at Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Wednesday, 9th April, 2003 at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Councillor R.V. Stockton (Chairman)
Councillor R. I. Matthews (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors B.C. Baldwin, M.R. Cunningham, J.G.S. Guthrie, T.W. Hunt, Mrs. M.D. Lloyd-Hayes, J.P. Thomas.

Non-voting Members: Mrs. E. Newman, (HALC), Mr D Stevens (Chamber of Commerce).

In attendance: Mr B. Widdowson (Chairman – Kington Regeneration Partnership), Councillors: A.C.R. Chappell (Cabinet Member – Economic Development), T.M. James (Leader of the Council), M.J. Kimbery (Cabinet Member – Social Development), R.J. Phillips (Chairman – Strategic Monitoring Committee).

67. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

68. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr. G. Knock and Councillor P.D. Evans.

The Chairman reported that Mr W. A. Gibbard, (HALC) had resigned from the Committee and he welcomed Mrs Elizabeth Newman as the non-voting member representing HALC (Herefordshire Association of Local Councils).

69. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

70. CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION ON ACCESS TO SERVICES – KINGTON: OPTIONS TO APPROACH AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

The Committee considered the decision of Cabinet on 27th March 2003, relating to Access to Services – Kington: Options to approach and implementation of service improvement which had been called-in by three members of the Committee in accordance with the Scrutiny Committee rules.

The stated reason for the call-in was:

“The Members are concerned that Cabinet appears to have identified the Wesleyan Chapel as the preferred location without having given sufficient consideration to the other options.

They are particularly concerned that:

1. insufficient local consultation has been undertaken on the proposed delivery options prior to this decision;

2. the position is unclear concerning the future financing of the project. While finance has been promised for the consultation, where will the further substantial finance be obtained to undertake the project. Will it require match funding?
3. in relation to option 1(b) in the report namely: demolition of existing area office site, and provision of new build that would require provision for Town Council, Library, INFO, TIC. - has a feasibility study been undertaken to find the cost of a full scheme to include a library?"

The Chairman welcomed Mr Widdowson, Chair of Kington Regeneration Partnership, and the members present. He referred to the reasons for the call-in – detailed above - and set out a number of further issues of concern. Comparisons were made with the Bromyard scheme and need for a community hall.

Mr Widdowson informed the meeting that the Partnership had, since 12th February 2003, been registered as a Company and was in the process of establishing the Company Board. He reported upon the background to the Wesleyan Chapel site and commented upon the need to bring this historic building back into use.

Any project backed by the Kington Regeneration Partnership had to be viable and an acceptable 'package' had to be submitted to Advantage West Midlands (AWM) particularly in relation to the various tenancies, including business tenancies, of the building. There were also time pressures over the availability of funding.

The Partnership had considered various issues concerning the provision of a Community facility, including potential revenue costs involved. It was considered that the Chapel had not met the requirements due to insufficient floor space and potentially high revenue costs.

He reported that various draft schemes had been looked at for the building over the last 4 or 5 years, e.g. a Youth Hostel, and these had been included in the public consultation exercise undertaken for 'Planning for Real'. However, this multi-use proposal for the site had been a recent proposal.

In response to a question regarding the 'Business Case', Mr Widdowson reported that AWM and the Council were putting a package together to investigate the various potential users of the site, which would have to include commercial use to help offset some of the revenue costs. AWM were already employing PCPT – a firm of architects - to design and cost a scheme to bring the building back into a useful state. He also commented that a number of funding streams – so far totalling approximately £400,000 - had been identified for initial project work.

Cllr Chappell, who had chaired the meeting attended by English Heritage, reported that various grants could be available for this type of project and that English Heritage had indicated that they would probably be interested in a project of this type. However, English Heritage could not consider funding issues until a business plan had been put together.

In relation to 'Services in Bromyard', which had been a similar scheme, the Leader of the Council informed the Committee that public consultation had been undertaken in Bromyard because draft plans had already been drawn up for a specific building. Consultation had not been held in Kington because no draft project plan existed. Until a viable business plan for this project had been fully considered by Cabinet, the project on this site could not proceed.

The Legal Practice Manager advised upon the constitutional position concerning any potential call-in of a future Cabinet decision on this issue. The Leader of the Council acknowledged that any future decision of Cabinet on this issue was likely to be a key

decision and would therefore be subject to call-in in accordance with the Scrutiny Committee rules.

In response to questioning regarding consideration of other sites, the Leader of the Council reported that no other available sites had been identified. In relation to the site referred to in option 1(b) - demolition of the existing area office – this would necessitate building on part of the car park, a facility that was already in short supply.

Concern was voiced that the project capital costs were likely to be in excess of £1.1m and the Customer Service, Libraries & Information Manager reported upon the professional advice received in arriving at this provisional figure and commented upon a number of issues concerning the structural aspect of the building.

The Director of Policy and Community commented that the Chapel was already in the Council's ownership and that the Council had the desire to improve access to and integration of services in the Kington area. These aims were consistent with the Partnership's main priorities. She reported that there were promising signs of major funding being available which may in turn draw further funding into the area.

A degree of unease was expressed over the cost of preparing designs and business plans, particularly when little consultation had been carried out with service users in the town and hinterland to establish their needs. It was emphasised that any project needed to be owned by the local community. The Leader of the Council emphasised that public consultation would be undertaken once a viable proposal had been formulated and costed, possibly via a special Local Area Forum.

The Committee discussed the representation on the Partnership and Mr Widdowson reported that since registering as a Company, issues had arisen concerning the size of the Board and obtaining a fair proportion of representation, particularly from Town/Parish/Herefordshire Councils.

In response to a question regarding the future delivery of Access to Services in Kington, should the Chapel site not be used, the Cabinet Member – Social Development, commented that it was an appropriate site but its use was dependent on a viable business case. The proposal was a useful solution to the use of a listed building, the renovation of which could attract major grant funding. Used or not the building would still need to be maintained.

The Chairman thanked Mr Widdowson and the Cabinet Members for their attendance at the meeting.

RESOLVED

THAT Cabinet be advised that the course of action being followed by the Cabinet is accepted in principle subject to the assurances given at the meeting that:

- (a) when Cabinet considers the 'Business Case' any decision made will be open to further scrutiny; and**
- (b) in addition to the consultation outlined in part (c) of the Statement of Key Decision, early consultation on the proposal would also be undertaken with as wide a section of the community as possible.**

The meeting ended at 11.50 p.m.

CHAIRMAN