

Rother District Council

COUNCIL MEETING

26 February 2024

PUBLIC QUESTION 1



Name of person submitting the question: Bernard Brown

Member to whom the question is to be put: Councillor Doug Oliver

CONTEXT

An original budget of £460,000 was set for the Town Hall Development Project.

Planning Consent for the scheme was refused in October 2022.

The Leader in answering a question at Full Council on 19 December 2022 said a total of £730,117 had been spent. Asked if further work on bringing forward another planning application was taking place the Leader replied: "The answer is no".

At the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13 March 2023 papers presented supported the figure of £730,000 quoted by the Leader.

The additional £270,000 had been spent without elected members having been asked for or giving approval to an increased expenditure of more than a further quarter of a million pounds.

All further work was supposed to have ceased on the project.

In the report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in 22 January 2024 Agenda Item 5 Appendix D reports the spend was actually £856,000. Not only is that £396,000 over the originally approved budget but it is more than £130,000 above the figure reported in March 2023 when all work was reported to have ceased on the project.

Question

All external work was reported to have been stopped on the Town Hall Development Project by December 2022. Since that date a further £130,000 is reported to have been spent. What has this money been spent on? Who authorised the expenditure? Where and when was this extra expenditure approved by elected Members? Where in any Council minutes can the decision to authorise such an increase be found?

Answer

This scheme is currently being reviewed alongside a more fundamental review of the larger projects within the capital programme, and an options paper will be coming forward to Cabinet for consideration this year.

This review has required further expenditure to enable officers to progress different options for consideration by Members with additional costs incurred in relation to consultancy and architects' fees, which will have been authorised by various officers.

The budget provision of £856k was recommended for approval by Cabinet in July 2023 as part of the 2022/23 outturn report, the minutes for which can be found [here](#).