

Rother District Council

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	4 November 2019
Report of the	-	Executive Director
Subject	-	Bexhill Town Centre Steering Group

Recommendation: It be RESOLVED: That:

- 1) the revised Terms of Reference for the Bexhill Town Centre Steering Group be agreed; and
 - 2) the allocation of the £41,370 of the Town Centre Section 106 funds be used to pay for the development of a Town Centre masterplan.
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Head of Service: Ben Hook

Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor Mrs Bayliss

Introduction

1. The Bexhill Town Centre Steering Group (BTCSG) was initially established in 2010, a non-incorporated partnership formed of Members and officers. One of the main roles of the BTCSG was to produce a strategy for the town centre.
2. The Bexhill Town Centre Strategy (BTCS) was published in 2013 after a period of consultation with key stakeholders within the town. The BTCSG continued to meet to discuss progress against the objectives within the strategy.
3. The BTCS is now six years on and much has changed in terms of the external environment and the projects and objectives sited within the strategy. At the 15 October 2018 BTCSG meeting, Members agreed that it was an opportune time to reflect on the strategy, review what has been achieved and consider a new strategic approach for the BTCSG moving forward and a new Terms of Reference (ToR) was approved by Cabinet on 5 November 2018 (CB18/35 refers).
4. In March 2019 a series of workshops were held to begin shaping a new BTCS and in April 2019, the Council submitted a Bexhill bid to the Future High Streets Fund.
5. The bid was unsuccessful with Newhaven being the only East Sussex town to progress past the first stage. The process has demonstrated the need for a coherent strategy and masterplan that articulates Bexhill's potential and clearly outlines our plans for the future of the Town Centre. The workshops did however begin the process of outlining the strategic options for the future of the Town Centre.

6. Following the elections in May 2019, it was decided that the original timetable did not allow sufficient time for the new administration to influence the development of the BTCS. Therefore a review of the approach has now taken place and the ToR for the BTCSG has been revised and is attached as Appendix 1 to outline the proposed way forward in order that the Council is better prepared for future funding opportunities.

Revised Terms of Reference:

7. The membership of the BTCSG has been amended to include a local resident, to be selected through an open process by application, appointed by the BTCSG and a representative of Rother Voluntary Action. The new ToR removes the Bexhill Town Team as a member of the BTCSG.
8. The key priority areas for the steering group have been revised to build on those that were discussed at the workshops, and will now be:
 - a. the future sustainable economy of the town centre including a clear way forward for retail and job creation;
 - b. understanding and improving movement and access between key economic assets within the town centre;
 - c. a focus on improving the quality of the residential offer in the town centre and ensure the mix of residential to retail / office accommodation is right; and
 - d. clarity and vision on how urban design and public realm can be improved to attract further inward investment into the town.

Next Steps

9. It is still necessary for the BTCSG to develop and agree a strategy for the future of Bexhill Town Centre. The development of this document will be led by officers at the steer of the BTCSG. However, to ensure that future bids for funding stand the best chance of success it is necessary to develop a visionary masterplan for the physical environment of the Town Centre.
10. In order to undertake the development of a Town Centre masterplan, the BTCSG would seek to appoint specialists in this field. There is currently £41,370 remaining within the town centre Section 106 funds, of which £20,000 is currently ring-fenced for public realm work. It is proposed to reallocate the full £41,370 towards the cost of developing a masterplan in which to bid for funding.

Timescales

11. The proposed timescales outlined in the table below were supported by the BTCSG.

ACTION	BY WHO	WHEN
Approval of refreshed ToR	Cabinet	November 2019
Appointment of Consultant	Bexhill Town Centre Steering Group	January 2020

Development of Strategy and Masterplan	RDC officers / consultants	January 2020 – April 2020
Agreement of Draft Strategy and Masterplan	Bexhill Town Centre Steering Group	April 2020
Consultation (including Scrutiny and Cabinet Approvals)	RDC Officers	April 2020 – July 2020
Recommendation of Strategy to Council	Cabinet	7 September 2020
Approval of Strategy	Full Council	21 September 2020

Conclusion and Recommendation

12. Funding opportunities for significant public realm improvements do not come along very often. The Future High Streets Fund is one such opportunity and it is anticipated that there will be a second round of funding available in 2020. To ensure that Bexhill Town Centre is best positioned to respond to a funding call it is necessary that a Town Centre Masterplan be developed alongside the BTCS.
13. The proposed revised ToR will reform the BTCSG membership and reflect new thinking around the Town Centre development following the town centre workshops held in March 2019.
14. To ensure that the ambitious plans emerging through the development of the strategy and masterplan can be achieved, it will be necessary to ensure that sufficient funding is made available to the BTCSG. With existing financial pressures on the Authority the only legitimate option is to utilise remaining monies paid through Section 106 contributions ring-fenced for Town Centre improvements.

Dr Anthony Leonard
Executive Director

Risk Assessment Statement

That without bringing in consultants to undertake the broad overview on town centre future growth and present professionally developed and presented ideas, we may not find ourselves in a position to compete with other authorities when bidding to future external funding.

BEXHILL TOWN CENTRE STEERING GROUP Terms of Reference

1. Purpose:

The Bexhill Town Centre Steering Group (BTCSG) is responsible for the development and delivery of a shared vision and action plan for the future of the Town Centre.

Working with a wide variety of stakeholders the BTCSG, led by Rother District Council (RDC), will create a new Town Centre Strategy and Master Plan that will clearly define and articulate the vision for the future sustainable economy of the area. The BTCSG will also set out a proposed funding approach and will be responsible for initiating engagement with key partners to secure funding for the delivery of the Strategy's aims and objectives. The BTCSG is tasked with being ambitious and aspirational in its plans for Bexhill.

This strategy will build on the work already delivered by the group in recent years. The ultimate ambition for this work is to provide Bexhill with a town centre that works for all those who use it, as residents, businesses and or visitors.

2. Objectives:

- 1) Develop, agree and implement an ambitious vision for the town centre that will set it out against other coastal towns on the South coast, will highlight and make best use of its unique and distinct features.
- 2) Develop a clear strategy for the long term future of Bexhill Town Centre with focus on addressing four key themes:
 - a. The future sustainable economy of the town centre including a clear way forward for retail and job creation.
 - b. Understanding and improving movement and access between key economic assets within the town centre
 - c. A focus on improving the quality of the residential offer in the town centre and ensure the mix of residential to retail/ office accommodation is right.
 - d. Clarity and vision on how urban design and public realm can be improved to attract further inward investment into the town.
- 3) Develop a visionary Masterplan for the physical environment in the Town Centre that can be broken down into manageable sub-projects to allow the ambition to be realised in stages and as when funding becomes available.
- 4) Set out an approach to funding and undertake action:
 - a. To commission any necessary studies or specialist expertise required to support the levering in of investment and the development of projects.
 - b. Identify opportunities for funding from a range of national, regional, and local funding sources and prepare bids to these in order to deliver the programme.
 - c. Where appropriate, through the development of business cases to promote inward private investment into the Town Centre.

3. Scope:

For the purposes of this work the Town Centre is considered to be the area in Bexhill Central ward to the south of the railway line. However the primary focus of intervention will be on Devonshire Road, Western Road, Sackville Road and Wickham Ave.

The BTCSG may also consider issues relating to areas adjacent to the defined area where appropriate and where they are likely to have a significant bearing on the town centre, such as the seafront.

The work of the BTCSG will complement Policy BX2 of the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy (adopted September 2014) and other relevant policy documents.

4. Membership and Structure:

The BTCSG will be an unincorporated partnership. It will be a small working group design to manage change and move things forward. The BTCSG will be chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Bexhill Affairs. By invitation, the core membership of the partnership will be formed of the following:

- Chair: Portfolio Holder for Bexhill Affairs
- RDC Members of Bexhill Central ward
- Leader of Rother District Council
- Two business representatives to be nominated by the Chair
- A resident representative (by application process)
- Locate East Sussex
- East Sussex County Council (ESCC) Portfolio Holder for Transport and Environment (or nominated ESCC substitute)
- CEO of the De La Warr Pavilion
- A representative of Rother Voluntary Action

Additional members may be invited by the Chair to join the BTCSG for specific workshops / meetings or on a more permanent basis as co-opted members.

The quorum for BTCSG meetings will be four.

The term of office for the appointed RDC Members will be coterminous with the election cycles of the Council.

The Leader of the Council is authorised to fill any RDC vacancy arising mid-term, following necessary consultation, without referral to Cabinet.

Support to the BTCSG will be provided by the Steering Group Co-ordinator, with other officers attending as necessary.

5. Meetings:

The BTCSG will meet twice yearly and additionally as and when required. The Partnership Coordinator will oversee administration and the agenda.

Meetings will:

- Not be open to the general public.

- Operate in a collaborative, open and effective way that views each member as an equal partner and values the contribution of partner organisations.
- Conduct business in a climate that seeks to find effective and realistic solutions through consensus.

6. Accountability and Transparency:

The BTCSG will be accountable to RDC's Cabinet.

Where required, RDC will act as the accountable body in respect of external funding for the delivery of projects within the masterplan. The BTCSG will not directly employ any staff or incur any direct staffing and associated costs. Members will not charge for their time and services arising from the proceedings of the BTCSG.

The work of the BTCSG will be publicised by the Partnership Coordinator, principally through the RDC website. However, at times there may be commercial sensitivities surrounding some projects that will be treated as confidential by all members, unless informed otherwise.

A Register of Interests will be maintained by the Steering Group Co-ordinator for those selected onto the BTCSG.

7. Communication and Press Protocol:

The BTCSG will develop a communications plan to engage with the local community, businesses and stakeholder groups. All enquiries should be referred to the Steering Group Co-ordinator who will ensure that a response is given in accordance with the relevant protocol.