

Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Minutes

Date: Thursday 22 September 2022

Time: 14:00pm – 3:55pm

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Present: Councillors Tom Sanderson (Chair), Hilary Cox Condrón (Vice-Chair), Adela Costello, Steve Criswell, Claire Daunton, Lorna Dupre, Janet French, Ian Gardener, Bryony Goodliffe, Ros Hathorn, Lucy Nethsingha, Dan Schumann and Philippa Slatter.

75. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Henry Batchelor (substituted by Councillor Lorna Dupre), Ken Billington (substituted by Councillor Ian Gardner), and Keith Prentice.

Councillor French declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in agenda item 5 (Communities Capital Fund - Recommendations of Steering Group on the Future of Incomplete Projects), as a member of Fenland District Council.

Councillor Gardener declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in agenda item 5 (Communities Capital Fund - Recommendations of Steering Group on the Future of Incomplete Projects), as the local member for Alconbury and Kimbolton.

Councillor D Schumann declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in agenda item 5 (Communities Capital Fund - Recommendations of Steering Group on the Future of Incomplete Projects), as the local member for Soham South and Haddenham.

Councillor Dupre noted, in relation to agenda item 5 (Communities Capital Fund - Recommendations of Steering Group on the Future of Incomplete Projects), that she had advised and assisted local residents who had submitted written statements to the Committee, although she confirmed that she would approach the matter with an open and impartial mind.

Councillor D Schumann noted, in relation to agenda item 5 (Communities Capital Fund - Recommendations of Steering Group on the Future of Incomplete Projects), that he had attended public meetings that discussed the Stretham Village Centre project, although he confirmed that he would approach the matter with an open and impartial mind.

76. Minutes – 21 July 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2022 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

77. Petitions and Public Questions

The Committee was informed that three public questions had been received and would be heard at the beginning of the relevant agenda item.

No petitions had been received.

78. Household Support Fund Update

The Committee received a report detailing a proposal to ensure that the Council's full £3,581,424 allocation of the Household Support Fund (HSF) could be spent by the deadline of 30th September 2022. The Monitoring Officer approved a general exception to the requirement for notification of key decisions to be published at least 28 days prior to the decision being made, on the basis of urgency, given that any funds from the HSF allocation that were unspent by the deadline would have to be returned. One third of the total funding had been ring fenced by the government to support pensioners, and approximately £800,000 of this portion remained unspent. An agreement had been reached with Anglian Water to deliver a payment holiday for pensioners who were in arrears with water bills, as set out in section 2 of the report. The Council had been unable to reach an equivalent agreement with customers of Cambridge Water, and although this resulted in an unequal use of the funds across the county, the Interim Deputy Director: Communities, Employment and Skills emphasised that the only alternative would be to not spend the funds at all, thus curtailing a significant level of available support for pensioners in Cambridgeshire.

In order to ensure the funds could be spent by 30th September 2022, it was proposed to delegate authority to the Interim Deputy Director for Communities, Employment and Skills to approve decisions on the final distribution of the funds once the exact amount had been established. It was also proposed to delegate authority to the Interim Deputy Director to respond to the demands of the final guidance for the forthcoming third HSF tranche that was due to commence on 1st October 2022, until formal decisions could be made by the Committee at its subsequent meeting on 1st November 2022.

While discussing the report, members:

- Paid tribute to officers for finding ways to ensure the full amount of HSF funding could be spent for the benefit of Cambridgeshire residents, but expressed concern that such a significant amount was being dealt with in such a way at such a late stage in the process, arguing that learning from the Covid-19 support hub and the wider Think Communities approach should have led to a cohesive methodology for taking advantage of such funding streams in a more efficient and targeted way. Acknowledging the concerns, the Interim Deputy Director emphasised that the ringfencing of a third of the fund for pensioners had been unexpected and most local authorities across the country had found themselves in a similar situation.
- Expressed concern that the proposed solution for spending the remaining funds did not involve a partner with which the Council already maintained a working

relationship, and members were informed that the Council was looking to increase the involvement of trusted partners, including district and city councils, in the third tranche of HSF.

- Requested that a further approach be made to Cambridge Water, or its parent company, South Staffordshire Water, in order to try and minimise the unequal distribution of funds across the county. Emphasising that only eight days remained in which the funds could be spent, the Interim Deputy Director agreed to make a further attempt. **Action required**

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Spend the available balance of funds within the pensioner element of the second tranche of Household Support Fund with Anglian Water (and potentially Cambridge Water) to support customers of pensionable age who are in arrears on their water bills;
- b) Delegate authority to the Interim Deputy Director: Communities, Employment and Skills, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee, to make decisions regarding the practical distribution of the balance of funds; and
- c) Delegate authority to the Interim Deputy Director: Communities, Employment and Skills, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee, to respond to the demands of the final guidance for the third tranche of the Household Support Fund until formal decisions can be taken at the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee meeting on 1 November 2022.

79. Communities Capital Fund – Recommendations of Steering Group

The Chair noted that three requests to address the Committee had been received from Councillor Richard Nuttall (on behalf of Stretham Parish Council), Caterina Darcy (on behalf of Residents2gether), and Councillor Douglas de Lacey (on behalf of Girton Parish Council).

Councillor Richard Nuttall was invited by the Chair to address the Committee. Requesting that the existing grant agreement for the Stretham Village Centre project be extended, Councillor Nuttall highlighted delays to the project that had been caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and drew attention to significant progress that had been achieved recently, including the submission of a planning application in July 2022, and the appointment of a Responsible Finance Officer, an architect and a quantity surveyor. Although overall costs had increased, the project had been split into three phases and he emphasised that funding from the Communities Capital Fund (CCF) would only be spent on the first of these phases, which involved the construction of the hub. Councillor Nuttall informed members that the NHS had agreed in principle to the installation of a GP surgery in the hub as part of the third phase. He noted that the Public Works Loan Board (PWLb) had indicated a loan would be possible for the project if an application was submitted following approval of the planning application, while an application had

been submitted to East Cambridgeshire District Council (ECDC) for Community Infrastructure Levy funding, and an application was also being prepared for ECDC's Growth and Infrastructure Fund.

In response to Councillor Nuttall's statement, members:

- Sought clarification on the overall cost of the project, as well as the separate phases. Objecting to a suggestion in paragraph 4.6.2 of the report that overall costs might have increased to over £3m, Councillor Nuttall informed members that the total cost for Stretham Parish Council would be around £2.25m, as the first phase would cost approximately £1.6m and the third phase would cost approximately £650k. The second phase involved retail units that would be paid for separately by the Stretham and Wilburton Community Land Trust. The Interim Deputy Director for Communities, Employment and Skills acknowledged that officers had been unable to demonstrate that costs had exceeded £3m and informed members that they should therefore disregard the suggestion in paragraph 4.6.2 of the report.
- Sought clarification on the sources of funding for the project. For the approximate £1.6m costs of the first phase, Councillor Nuttall confirmed that approximately £500k would come from CCF funding, if the Committee agreed to extend the existing grant, £550k would come from the ECDC Community Infrastructure Levy, approximately £150k would come from the sale of the existing parish rooms, and the remaining cost of approximately £400k, subject to any additional funding obtained from alternative sources, would be covered by a PWLB loan. For the approximate £650k costs of the third phase, approximately £100k would come from the PWLB loan, with the remainder coming from the ECDC Growth and Infrastructure Fund.
- Sought clarification on the level of assurance that had been provided by the PWLB with regard to a potential loan. Noting that a formal application involved various levels of agreement and could not be submitted before planning approval had been received, Councillor Nuttall clarified that the PWLB had indicated that funding of up to £650k would likely be approved to Stretham Parish Council, based on the project details that had been included in the query.
- Sought clarification on how a loan from the PWLB would be repaid. Confirming that the majority of the rent paid by the NHS for the GP surgery would be used for loan repayments, Councillor Nuttall highlighted the objective to obtain as much funding as possible from alternative sources, in order to minimise the size of the loan that would be required from the PWLB. Members queried how the loan would be repaid if phase three was not completed and there was no rental income from the NHS. Noting that the loan required would be smaller if phase three were to not go ahead, Councillor Nuttall informed members that there were also other sources of funding that could be applied for in order to further reduce the level of the loan required.
- Sought clarification on the level of agreement that had been provided by the NHS for a GP surgery in the hub. Councillor Nuttall confirmed that an expression of interest, including the amount of rent that would be paid by the NHS for use of the space, had been submitted to NHS commissioners and agreed in principle, although he acknowledged that a written confirmation had not been received.

- Sought clarification on what would happen if the project were to only complete phase one and neither of the other phases. Acknowledging that this would result in there not being a GP surgery, pharmacy or other retail space in the hub, Councillor Nuttall emphasised that the primary objective of the project was to deliver a new community hall and facilities for Stretham. The project had been split into three phases to make this objective more affordable and therefore more achievable, given that less funding would be required for its completion than for the overall project.
- Sought clarification on the status of the planning application. Councillor Nuttall informed members that following an initial preapplication, the full application was submitted in July 2022 and was due to be considered by East Cambridgeshire District Council's Planning Committee in October 2022.
- Sought clarification on how the parish council had calculated the level of community support for or opposition to the project, noting that the issue had been the cause of significant debate at recent meetings of the parish council, and queried whether a local referendum would be held. Clarifying that the parish council had not organised a public vote on the project, Councillor Nuttall informed members that a consultation had been held over two days in November and December 2021, and suggested that some supporters of the project had felt too intimidated to express their support. He confirmed that the community would have further opportunities to contribute and participate in the development of the project and its design, although it had not been decided whether to hold a local referendum.
- Sought clarification on how the parish council would ensure that the hub was integrated with the whole of the local community, rather than just the new development in which it would be located. Noting that the location had been considered the most viable of seven possible sites, Councillor Nuttall assured members that the hub was well connected to the whole village. He emphasised that the objective of the project had always been to provide more than just new parish rooms, which he suggested could have been delivered separately at a much lower cost. Instead, the larger hub would serve as a magnet to the community, drawing a GP surgery, a pharmacy, retail units and space for parish council meetings.
- Sought clarification on how the project had been delayed by the pandemic, and when the final designs for the project would be ready. Councillor Nuttall observed that parish council meetings had been cancelled and therefore delegations to progress the project had not been possible, while other project-related meetings were not able to be held because of restrictions that had been in place. It was hoped that the final designs would be ready at the end of October 2022.
- Sought clarification on the size of the project team. Councillor Nuttall informed members that six members of the parish council were on the team tasked with progressing the project to the construction stage, alongside an architect and a Responsible Finance Officer.

Caterina Darcy was invited by the Chair to address the Committee on behalf of Residents2gether, a group of Stretham parish residents. Arguing that Stretham Parish Council had not addressed significant local opposition to the project by failing to engage with or consult residents in a meaningful way, Ms Darcy informed members that a vote

at a recent meeting of Stretham residents resulted in over a hundred votes against the project and only two in favour. She also noted the planning application that had been submitted included fifty-four objections and only twenty-two supporting statements. Ms Darcy suggested that an open procurement process had not been held for the project and expressed concern that details of costs and future maintenance plans had not been made public. She argued that cheaper and more sustainable alternatives had been proposed and expressed concern that a loan from the PWLB would lead to an increase in the parish council's precept. Although she welcomed the agreement in principle from the NHS for a GP surgery, Ms Darcy observed that a surgery had been included in previous unsuccessful schemes of the parish council, and suggested that it should therefore be disregarded by the Committee until a formal commitment had been made by the NHS.

In response to Ms Darcy's statement, members:

- Sought clarification on the number of residents in the parish of Stretham. It was confirmed that a recent byelection indicated an electorate of 1565 people.
- Sought clarification on Ms Darcy's suggestion that there had been no meaningful consultation with residents on the project, noting that Councillor Nuttall had informed members of a two day consultation in 2021. Acknowledging that the consultation had occurred, Ms Darcy argued that it merely presented the project design and did not engage with the community or seek to establish whether there was local support.
- Sought clarification on whether Residents2gether had engaged with the local community to establish levels of support or opposition to the project. Noting that a petition opposing the project signed by over 200 people had been submitted to the parish council, Ms Darcy informed members that a recent poll on social media had resulted in 88% opposing the project, although it was observed that the poll was carried out within a social media group that specifically objected to the project.

Councillor Douglas de Lacey was invited by the Chair to address the Committee. Acknowledging that the Girton Pavilion project had experienced delays due to the Covid-19 pandemic, local elections and the UK's withdrawal from the EU, Councillor de Lacey assured members that the project was still underway and scheduled for completion, and requested that the current grant agreement be extended. Accepting that Girton Parish Council had not returned the requested variation form to the Council in a sufficiently detailed state, he confirmed that the parish council held enough financial reserves to cover the remaining costs of the project, and would therefore not require any further matched funding. Value engineering was being carried out to establish whether the costs could be reduced, although he emphasised that this would not affect any of the project's original outcomes. A detailed project plan was in place and an updated version would be submitted to the Council following completion of the value engineering process.

The Committee received a report outlining recommendations from the Communities Capital Fund Steering Group following its review of projects that had failed to progress or were incomplete. Of the eight projects that were reviewed, the steering group recommended the extension of four grant agreements, the termination of two grant

agreements, an amendment to one project plan, and an invitation for one project to submit a new application, as set out in section 4 of the report.

With regard to the recommendation to terminate the Girton Pavilion grant agreement, the Interim Deputy Director drew attention to subsequent assurances that had been received from Girton Parish Council that they had sufficient resources to meet the current funding gap and complete the project. Noting that a supposed lack of funds was one of the key factors that had led the steering group to recommend termination of the grant agreement, the Interim Deputy Director requested that the Committee accept a change to the recommendation and for the Girton Pavilion project to be referred back to the steering group for reconsideration.

With regard to the recommendation to terminate the Stretham Village Centre project, the Interim Deputy Director acknowledged that a planning application had been submitted and that Stretham Parish Council was therefore now able to apply for a PWLB loan, although he emphasised that the steering group's concerns about a lack of secured matched funding remained valid. However, given that attempts had been made by the parish council to demonstrate how such funding could be obtained and that changes had been proposed to the project that could affect its original objectives, he requested that the Committee accept a change to the recommendation and for the Stretham Village Centre project to be referred back to the steering group for reconsideration.

While discussing the report, members:

- Paid tribute to the work of officers in supporting the projects and the steering group's review process.
- Acknowledged that construction was underway on the table crossing project in Kimbolton despite experiencing delays due to a lack of availability of materials, and welcomed the proposal to invite the parish council to submit a new application.
- Agreed that the assurances provided by Girton Parish Council that it could cover the costs to complete the Girton Pavilion project were sufficient to ask the steering group to reconsider its review of the project. It was confirmed that authority to approve any revised recommendation from the steering group on the Girton Pavilion project could be delegated to the Interim Deputy Director for Communities, Employment and Skills, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee.
- Considered whether Stretham Parish Council had provided sufficient assurances that it would be able to obtain the necessary resources to complete the Stretham Village Centre project, expressing concern that the cost of the project had risen from £1.6m to £2.25m. Some members argued that the parish council should be given more time to seek additional funding, while other members suggested that the ongoing uncertainties meant that the Council should not hold up limited resources any longer when there were other community projects that would benefit from the funding.

- Expressed concern that there was no formal agreement with the NHS for a GP surgery to be located in the Stretham hub, and argued that it should therefore not be considered as a factor in the decision on whether to terminate the grant agreement. It was also observed that there were alternative routes for communities to obtain GP surgeries, such as through Section 106 funding.
- Expressed concern about the level of opposition within the local community to the Stretham Village Centre project, although it was acknowledged that there was also a significant level of support within the community. One member highlighted that most of the opposition was based on the location of the hub, noting that the land had been gifted to the parish council for the purpose, and emphasised that the location had not been a reason for the steering group recommending termination of the grant agreement.
- Observed that the Committee did have access to all the project documents and submissions that the steering group had reviewed, and argued that additional information and assurances submitted by projects since the publication of the report should therefore be considered by the steering group instead of the Committee, noting that such reconsideration would not necessarily lead to a change in the steering group's original recommendations.
- Observed that projects were regularly split into various phases for funding purposes, and argued that such growth and development of the project should not be considered as detrimental, especially when the primary feature of the project was included in the first phase, which was the only phase connected to the funding from the CCF.
- Noted that if the Stretham Village Centre project's grant agreement was terminated, the parish council would still be able to submit a new application to the proposed Cambridge Priorities Capital Fund once the planning application had been approved by East Cambridgeshire District Council, and further funding and formal agreement from the NHS for a GP surgery had been obtained. The Interim Deputy Director clarified that the criteria for that fund had yet to be established, and that a new submission would be part of a competitive process, therefore not benefitting from any kind of priority.
- Argued that terminating the grant agreement for the Stretham Village Centre project would make it more difficult for the parish council to successfully apply for alternative sources of funding.
- Sought clarification on how much of the approved grant had already been spent on the Stretham Village Centre project. The Interim Deputy Director informed members that an initial tranche of £40k had been provided to the parish council upon the signing of the grant agreement, with a further tranche of £50k also provided based on indicative approval of the planning application. Although the initial £40k had been spent, he suggested that efforts could be made to reclaim the subsequent payments of £50k.
- Established that a large number of projects that received funding from the CCF were approved grants prior to planning permission having been granted. The Interim

Deputy Director clarified that approval of planning permission was included as a required milestone for such projects, and he observed that the Committee could consider the issue when establishing the criteria for the new capital fund.

Following the discussion, the Committee was asked to vote on whether to accept the Interim Deputy Director's proposed changes to the recommendations and to refer the Girton Pavilion project and the Stretham Village Centre project back to the steering group for reconsideration.

It was resolved unanimously to accept the proposed change in relation to the Girton Pavilion project.

Following a vote with an equal number of members voting for and against, it was resolved by the Chair exercising a casting vote to reject the proposed change in relation to the Stretham Village Centre project.

[Note - Following the meeting, it was confirmed that it had been resolved by majority to reject the proposed change in relation to the Stretham Village Centre project, and that the Chair therefore had not needed to exercise a casting vote.]

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Agree a request to amend the Fenstanton Community Hub project plan, where that request is either cost neutral or results in the project requiring an amount less than the financial allocation originally awarded (and where the original outcomes that led to the award of the funding can still be met);
- b) Refer the Girton Pavilion project back to the Steering Group for reconsideration;
- c) Extend the existing Godmanchester Football & Sports Association Trust grant agreement with no amendments other than those relating to milestone and completion dates;
- d) Invite the Kimbolton Parish Council project to submit a new application for additional funding to allow it to complete the project;
- e) Terminate the Stretham Village Centre grant agreement;
- f) Extend the existing Wisbech Park Pavilion grant agreement with no amendments other than those relating to milestone and completion dates;
- g) Extend the existing Littleport Community Hub grant agreement with no amendments other than those relating to milestone and completion dates;
- h) Extend the existing Godmanchester Nursery grant agreement with no amendments other than those relating to milestone and completion dates; and
- i) Subject to recommendation d), delegate authority to approve a new application from Kimbolton Parish Council to the Interim Deputy Director for Communities,

Employment and Skills, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee; and

- j) Subject to recommendation b) delegate authority to approve the Steering Group's revised recommendation on the Gorton Pavilion project to the Interim Deputy Director for Communities, Employment and Skills, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee.

80. Community, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Agenda Plan

While noting its agenda plan, the Committee was informed that the Library Service Review Update would be presented at the meeting on 8th December 2022, instead of the meeting on 1st November 2022.

Chair
1st November 2022