

TONBRIDGE TOWN CENTRE ASSET REVIEW – PHASE 2

Item FRP 24/4 referred from Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Select Committee of 12 March 2024

The joint report of the Cabinet and Management Team set out a number of options in respect of Phase 2 of the Tonbridge Town Centre asset review; proposed the creation of a Tonbridge Town Centre Programme Board and sought views on the strategic direction for how the aims and objectives could be achieved.

Members noted that Phase 2 was the next step in a long process associated with bringing forward a major town centre redevelopment and welcomed the opportunity to comment on the types of uses that could be considered in the area east of the High Street and on a wide range of matters to help inform the strategic direction the work took in future phases. Reference was made to the risks associated with progressing a town centre redevelopment scheme especially if there was not a robust governance arrangement in place for taking forward such a large and complex programme of work. The establishment of a specific Tonbridge Town Centre Programme Board with clear terms of reference was one way of mitigating those risks. In addition, to ensure that all areas of work were effectively co-ordinated the appointment of a Tonbridge Town Centre Programme Manager was supported.

Careful consideration was given to the detailed reports and assessments provided by the external consultant, Mace, set out in the attached annexes. There was detailed discussion on a number of significant issues including governance and project management, parking, housing and engagement and consultation with key stakeholders and the public. Due regard was also given to climate change factors, affordable housing for local residents, the financial and value for money implications and local infrastructure.

Members expressed preferences in relation to aspects of the project and a number of recommendations were proposed, seconded and supported.

***RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) the Phase 2 reports from Mace be noted;
- (2) in order to facilitate efficient and consistent decision making, Officers be instructed to develop terms of reference for a Tonbridge Town Centre Programme Board (as set out in 1.3.6, 1.3.7 and Annex 6) for Cabinet approval;
- (3) on the grounds that the proposals from Sainsbury PLC, the potential provision of a hotel and medical practice were likely to attract greater numbers to the town, the Borough Councils general approach to parking should be to provide unallocated parking spaces between the current 970 and anticipated future peak demand;

- (4) options for a podium parking solution with development above, be explored for Angel West car park;
- (5) the Borough Councils general approach to housing should be to focus on low-rise high-density housing types and any development should maximise affordable housing provision and place the needs of local residents first and should preferably be delivered by a Borough Council owned housing company, subject to further investigation by the Programme Board and more detailed viability work being undertaken;
- (6) options be explored for retail and commercial use around public spaces that provided flexible, simple units to optimise value, with the Borough Council acting as landlord for any new retail units and recognising the precarious nature of the High Street and not risk the viability of current commercial businesses by the creation of an alternative shopping centre;
- (7) options for a hotel be included in the project with the possibility of the Borough Council acting as developer and landlord;
- (8) the inclusion of a GP Practice be supported on the grounds of providing adequate infrastructure for residents and the Borough Council should look to incorporate into the redevelopment as landlord;
- (9) the Borough Council should aspire to undertake a master developer role to influence the shape, style and design of the development so that it remained sympathetic to the local area; and the extent and scope of this role should be reviewed by the Tonbridge Town Centre Programme Board;
- (10) the Borough Council should explore a collaborative agreement with Network Rail in relation to their train station car park sites and the Tonbridge Town Centre Programme Board should consider whether other stakeholders and/or landowners should be approached;
- (11) the Borough Council should commit to a net zero baseline as a fundamental requirement of the development;
- (12) to guarantee continuity of service for leisure and community users, the Angel Centre should remain open and in operation until a replacement facility was available;
- (13) upon completion of the Alliance Leisure feasibility study on options for potential leisure and community uses, facilities and locations, and subject to agreement

of the Tonbridge Town Centre Programme Board, full public consultation be undertaken as soon as possible on the master plan proposals;

- (14) the Tonbridge Town Centre Programme Board be requested to liaise with key stakeholders, partners and landowners to discuss options around services and operations;
- (15) Officers be instructed to develop a communication strategy for the Tonbridge Town Centre Project to be reported to a future meeting of the Programme Board for consideration; and
- (16) Officers be instructed to progress a masterplan exercise for the area east of the High Street.

***Recommended to Cabinet**