

REGENERATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SKILLS PORTFOLIO

DECISION RECORD

16 January 2012

The meeting commenced at 9.00 a.m. in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor Peter Jackson (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Economic Development and Skills)

Officers: Damien Wilson, Assistant Director, Regeneration and Planning
Andy Golightly, Senior Regeneration Officer
Rob Smith, Senior Regeneration Officer
Maggie Heaps, Adult Education Co-ordinator
Amanda Whitaker and David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

7. Grants for Key Vacant Buildings Update *(Assistant Director (Regeneration and Planning))*

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To provide an update on progress with the current grant scheme that is seeking to provide support for vacant, underused buildings and sites. The report also seeks Portfolio Holder approval to address other key empty buildings.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The Senior Regeneration Officer reported that the grant project focused on the central area of York Road and the Brenda Road area of the Southern Business Zone had been running for approximately 18 months. This scheme had previously been approved by Portfolio Holder (21/05/10). The purpose of the grant scheme was to focus resources on empty or underused buildings and sites. In order to achieve maximum impact it was agreed that there would be an initial focus on areas with a concentration of empty and disused properties. The initial focus, therefore, had been York Road between Victoria Road and Park Road and the Brenda Road area of the Southern Business Zone.

The Key Vacant Buildings Grant scheme has £200,000 allocated for improvements to business premises from the Councils capital fund. As well

as focusing on vacant properties and sites the grant scheme aimed to support business creation, job creation and job safeguarding opportunities.

To date nine grants had been approved. Two of these nine grants schemes had been completed resulting in the re-use of two empty properties, and two further schemes were on site and were due to be completed shortly. Start dates were awaited for the remaining five properties that had had grant applications approved. Overall these grant approvals mean that £122,102 of the grant funding was currently committed.

In order to maximise the benefit of the grant fund, officers had reviewed the areas where the grants were currently targeted and approached any remaining eligible properties. To help to commit the remaining resources and to continue to target vacant buildings and sites and to bring empty properties back into use, it was proposed that grants were offered to specific property owners outside the areas currently being targeted. Flexibility was built into the grant scheme when it was initially set up to enable the Council to respond to other eligible enquiries and target specific priority buildings and sites in the wider town centre once demand in the priority areas had been met. This would enable grants to be available to complement other town centre initiatives such as the Innovation and Skills Quarter.

The Portfolio Holder welcomed the proposal to widen the area of the grant scheme and extend the benefits of bringing unused properties back into use. The Portfolio Holder was concerned that the situation didn't arise where potential schemes in the York Road area failed to get funding because it had been allocated to properties elsewhere. The Portfolio Holder indicated that he was extremely supportive of the scheme and working with people in the town centre area to bring properties back into use. The Portfolio Holder requested a brief matrix report setting out where the various properties/schemes in the process. The Assistant Director indicated that this would be provided. The Assistant Director also commented that the extension of the use of s215 powers recently discussed through Planning Committee may also stimulate more property owners into coming forward to work with the council to bring their properties back into use.

Decision

That the progress made regarding the provision of grants to date be noted and the proposal to extend the area of the scheme to utilise the remaining uncommitted grant funding be approved.

8. Annual Self Assessment Report for SFA Funded Provision *(Director of Child and Adult Services)*

Type of decision

Non-key.

Purpose of report

To update the portfolio holder on the annual Self Assessment Report for Skills Funding Agency (SFA) funded provision for academic year 2010/11.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The Adult Education Coordinator reported that as part of the funding agreement with the Skills Funding Agency all providers were required to complete an annual Self Assessment Report (SAR). The SAR was an in depth analysis of the funded activities during the preceding academic year. The judgements in the report were based on the criteria as defined in the Common Inspection Framework for the inspection of post 16 providers of education. The SAR was also a key document used by Ofsted as the starting point for any inspection of the Council provision. The SAR had been submitted to and accepted by Ofsted.

The summary of grades awarded were set out in the appendix to the report. The summary showed that the majority of the areas had achieved level 2, with one, Business Administration and Law, achieving the highest score of level 1. There were three areas with level 3 and it was reported that external advice was being sought in developing improvement plans.

The Portfolio Holder indicated that the authority must not lose sight of the fact that the achievement of level 2 on the majority of sections in the Common Inspection Framework was an excellent achievement and the staff concerned should be congratulated on that.

Decision

That the report be noted and the Self Assessment Report be approved for submission to the Skills Funding Agency.

9. Maintenance of Church Square *(Assistant Director (Regeneration and Planning))*

Type of decision

None – the report was for the Portfolio Holder's information only.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report is to inform the Portfolio Holder of potential savings in maintenance budgets when comparing the new scheme that has been designed for Church Square against the existing maintenance requirements.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The Senior Regeneration Officer reported on the maintenance that had been undertaken in Church Square over the past few years and compared it with the anticipated maintenance requirements if the square was redeveloped at a future time. The Portfolio Holder had considered the results of the public consultation for the first phase of the Church Square

Masterplan on the 14th October 2011 and deferred the scheme until a more economically suitable time and requested that a further report be presented for information on what potential savings on maintenance and compensation costs could be achieved if Church Square was to be redeveloped. The report submitted set out that detailed information.

It was highlighted that being in the Church Street Conservation area, the square should be maintained to conservation area standards through the use of natural stone for paving works for example. Due to maintenance issues over recent years, this had not always been the case and recently, the vehicle access areas had been tarmaced as a short term resolution until a wider improvement scheme, including the restriction of vehicular access was implemented.

The Portfolio Holder thanked the officer for the report and indicated that should there be sufficient finance in the future to implement the full scheme then that would be the preferred course of action. However, in the current financial situation, minimising maintenance had to be accepted as the short-term solution. The Assistant Director indicated that there was a suggestion coming forward from government that there may be a focus on town centre regeneration, possibly funded through the Local Enterprise Partnership.

Decision

That the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 9.12 a.m.

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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