

Projects Summary and Build a Better Borough Projects

Q1 2023/24 (April-June 2023)

Five Year Plan Projects

1. Project

Create a new Local Plan for the Borough.

Status

AMBER

The Local Plan has been submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination, in accordance with the latest timetable. A Planning Inspector has been appointed to undertake the Examination.

Examination Hearings were held in March and between May and July 2022. This varies slightly from the published timetable in the Local Development Scheme (October 2021) which had considered that these would be completed by April.

The Council has now received the Inspectors post-hearing Initials Findings letter which raises a number of matters that need resolving in order that the Local Plan can progress on to adoption. Officers are working on the matters with consultants and stakeholders and will present an update to members when the work is completed, which will be after the May elections. A review of

the Local Development Scheme will be undertaken at the same time to set the timetable for the adoption of the Local Plan.

As a result of these additional requirements and the need for additional post hearing further work adoption of the Local Plan has been delayed.

2. Project

Create new sports facilities for the Borough.

Status

GREEN

Update

Currently awaiting outcome of Local Plan examination. From the Inspector's Initial Findings letter no issues of principle were raised with respect to the sport pitches policies. With regards to Hawkenbury Recreation Ground (Policy AL/RTW 19) the Inspector concluded it would be appropriate to consult on the road widening and re-provision of parking spaces that had been provided in a later evidence document provided to the Hearing.

3. Project

Support the development of community centres in the borough: Cranbrook

Status

AMBER

Update

One of the three GPs who is part of the consortium to deliver the community centre is unwell and is therefore seeking to pass on their NHS contract. Following negotiations with a third party the deal has fallen through and we await further news in terms of who is going to be able to take over the contract moving forward. Once this is known and if the new owner remains supportive of the community centre, the final NHS specification can then be signed off to enable the development to move ahead.

Works can then start on a Pre-Construction Services Agreement via the KCC framework.

Feasibility picked up c£300k of risk within ground conditions so geotecks were undertaken and this has identified the fact that the risk is low so these costs could be mitigated. Figures are at risk of inflation and the bank of England rate that continues to escalate leading to potential viability issues in the future. However the rental rates for the NHS have also increased because of this.

Project will be going out to procurement on the QS and potentially the TPM as well. TPM costs can be avoided for a while if TWBC officer time is used and this could be done up to RIBA 3 but no further.

KCC has given the parish written confirmation that they are keen to see the project progress and that they would support the library moving in and that they will consult with KCC Corporate Landlord to determine what degree of investment can be allowed for. Parish is seeking £500k + all S106 funds sought to date.

VAT report has concluded that there is a c£560k hit on the capital costs of the building and or a hit on the leasehold income to the council and or a revenue impact to the NHS. The project can still stack up despite these additional costs however the payback period goes beyond the 25 years initially desired by the Council. The revenue income from the NHS is estimated at c£170k per annum and the best outcome would be for the NHS to pick up the VAT revenue costs.

4. Project

Support the development of community centres in the borough: Paddock Wood

Status

GREEN

Update

Project is now complete from the build perspective and was handed back to Paddock Wood Community Centre on 3 March 2023.

The Town Council has incorporated a charitable company to run the facility going forward and a lease has been prepared to transfer it over to the Company Limited by Guarantee on handover, which avoids any VAT on the construction element.

Marketing of the nursery/pre-school has secured them a good tenant and final lease negotiations are underway. A site manager has been employed to run the centre with the facilities management contract now in place with Baxall for the first year.

Furniture fit out has commenced, followed by an opening date to be confirmed but anticipated to be in September 2023.

Build a Better Borough Projects

SAFEGUARDING FINANCES

Good progress has been made across many projects. Repurposing the Town Hall continues with our partner, Town Square. Change of use and listed building consent have been granted and Main co-working refurbishment work is likely to get underway in Q3 2023. The savings plan and people strategy are progressing on schedule. The car parking strategy has been delayed due to competing priorities and revised dates are being established.

VIBRANT & SAFER

Excellent progress has been maintained across much of this theme. Resident engagement has been completed to support the five-year plan. The activities to develop tourism in the are progressing well together with work to develop a new business pack that will enhance the current business portal. The distribution of funds from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund is moving head on track. Quotes have been obtained to install additional charging points in some car parks with contractors now being sought. The installation of CCTV in car parks requires further research until the specification can be finalised.

CARBON REDUCTION

A pesticide and herbicide policy has been published and work to renew our Biodiversity action plan is being taken forward. The work to enable significant carbon reduction from the Weald Leisure Centre and North Farm Depot is likely to be implemented fully by the end of this year. Due to a key member of staff leaving the Authority the work to expand the current climate emergency web site and progress the Borough wide emissions strategy is delayed.

HOUSING

Activities leading to the delivery of more affordable housing is moving at pace. The empty property strategy and policy will be updated fully by the end of this year. The Town Centre development plan has extended the call for sites slot until August 2023. Dates for production of the Local Plan are being reassessed taking into account the iterative nature and complexity of this work.

DIGITAL

The resident's survey is well underway and currently the results are being analysed following the three-month period the survey was open. The communication plan review has been completed and phases are being delivered including the 'what we do' campaign. A review of the way Tunbridge Wells Borough Council provides data to residents is due to start in Q3 2023 with an aim of making the data and information more accessible. Resourcing issues have impacted development of a digital transformation plan and dates are being reassessed.

OTHER

A review of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Governance arrangements is underway with a report due in Q4 2023.