

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Scrutiny Committee – 21 March 2019

Call-in, by Councillors Habib Farbahi and Ian Morrell, of the decision made by Executive Councillor Mark Edwards to approve allocation of £825,000 from New Homes Bonus for site enabling activities in order for site action planning and business case development to progress and to adequately secure the site and enhance the physical environment.

Executive Councillor Mark Edward's decision announced via an all councillor email on 13 March 2019 was as follows:-

“Following the successful conclusion of the outline planning process for the site, the Council is progressing action planning for delivering the Firepool master plan, a full report on this issue will be presented to Council in due course. In order to progress matters and keep up momentum a number of tasks need to be completed on the site and it is proposed to re-profile funding from New Homes Bonus to fund this activity.

Proposed works include:-

- Funding NIDR access as Section 106 requirement to be completed by SCC in coming months.
- Site clearance and site investigations.
- Site set up works including boundary fence renewal.
- Demolitions of minor structures and slabs and making good.

Works will be completed on site to start to reinforce the prominence of the boulevard in the development, explore the provision of pedestrian access to canal road and pay and display car park from the station and enhance site appearance and security. These actions will facilitate progression of site delivery action planning for the site, viability assessments and prepare for discussions with investors and stakeholders.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

Not progressing early site enabling and preparatory works will cause delay in progressing site action planning and business case development and expose the Council to further risk and associated abortive costs and lost opportunity.”

This decision has now been called in by Councillors Habib Farbahi and Ian Morrell for the reasons set out below:-

“Considering the Council's failure to date in progressing Firepool as an employment site, coupled with a significant market emphasis against the retail economy since the granting of outline planning consent, the Council's decision on further Firepool Enabling Works totalling £825,000:

1. Lacks meaningful detail and/or evidence in support;
2. Requires, by effect of the financial sum in issue, due regard to the Council's democratic decision-making process.”

Once the Scrutiny Committee has heard the full debate on this matter, it will have two options open to it:-

- (1) To support the challenge and refer the decision for further consideration** (stating the grounds for justifying that request) – where the matter will be considered again by Executive Councillor Edwards.
- (2) To decide to take no further action** – in which case the decision of the Executive Councillor Edwards of 13 March 2019 will stand.

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Appendix A – Decision Form signed and published 13/3/2019

Appendix B – Call-In Request Form submitted 19/3/2019