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Our reference:
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Date: 29 September 2023

To all Members of the West Bridgford Special Expenses and Community Infrastructure Levy Advisory Group

Dear Councillor

A Meeting of the West Bridgford Special Expenses and Community Infrastructure Levy Advisory Group will be held on Monday, 9 October 2023 at 4.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Rushcliffe Arena, Rugby Road, West Bridgford to consider the following items of business.

Yours sincerely



Gemma Dennis
Monitoring Officer

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Declarations of Interest
3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 November 2022 (Pages 1 - 6)
4. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Update

Presentation by James Bate – Team Manager – Planning, Monitoring and Implementation – and Matthew Sawyer – Planning Contributions Officer

5. West Park Update
- Presentation by Derek Hayden – Community Development Manager

6. Special Expenses Budget 2024/25
- Presentation By Sarah Whittaker – Service Manager – Finance



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Membership

Chair: Councillor D Viridi

Councillors: J Chaplain, S Dellar, R Mallender, P Matthews, A Phillips, D Polenta, G Wheeler and J Wheeler

Meeting Room Guidance

Fire Alarm Evacuation: In the event of an alarm sounding please evacuate the building using the nearest fire exit, normally through the Council Chamber. You should assemble at the far side of the plaza outside the main entrance to the building.

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MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
WEST BRIDGFORD SPECIAL EXPENSES AND COMMUNITY
INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY ADVISORY GROUP
MONDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2022

Held at 4.00 pm in the Council Chamber Area A, Rushcliffe Arena, Rugby Road,
West Bridgford

PRESENT:

Councillors G Moore (Chairman), P Gowland, R Jones, R Mallender,
S J Robinson, D Viridi, G Wheeler and J Wheeler

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

<p>J Bate</p> <p>D Hayden</p> <p>P Linfield</p> <p>M Sawyer</p> <p>S Whittaker</p> <p>H Tambini</p>	<p>Team Manager - Planning, Monitoring and Implementation Communities Manager</p> <p>Director of Finance and Corporate Services</p> <p>Planning Contributions Officer</p> <p>Service Manager - Finance</p> <p>Democratic Services Manager</p>
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1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 December 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2021, were approved as a true record of the meeting.

3 Community Infrastructure Levy Update

The Planning Contributions Officer delivered a presentation to the Group, which provided an update on the West Bridgford Neighbourhood CIL.

The presentation covered:

- Issues covered at the previous meeting and what was agreed
- Financial update
 - CIL Type
 - Collected to date
 - Potential future collection
- Expression of Interest (EOI) form
- Process for EOI forms

It was summarised that the EOI forms were ready to be published and distributed to Ward Councillors and identified community groups this week, for

officers to then consider any submissions to ensure that a project was eligible, prior to them being considered by the Group at a meeting in February 2023. Views of residents would be sought through a four week consultation, following agreement of projects in principle.

In answer to a question regarding the forthcoming elections and purdah, the Director – Finance and Corporate Services confirmed that any discussions in February would be before the purdah period commenced.

Concern was expressed by a member of the Group that although significant development was taking place in Edwalton, Gamston and Musters, the new community groups there were not yet fully established, unlike other community groups, which were likely to put in submissions, and it was hoped that this would be a level process with all areas being given the opportunity to put ideas forward. Equally if established groups were to put forward ideas, which were then rejected, as they did not relate to a development, that could also lead to conflict, and it was important that this should be a positive experience, with Councillors being involved early in the process, to help manage expectations.

Officers confirmed that one element would be to consider where development had taken place, and to link it to the project being delivered, although in some cases that would not mean that they had to be on the doorstep, it could be library facilities or a youth group for example. Whilst it was acknowledged that it would be a challenge to engage in areas where the community groups were newly established, it was hoped that as the areas already developed would have an initial baseline infrastructure, that would also help them.

Members of the Group referred to the importance of ensuring that projects benefited the whole of West Bridgford and stated that it was important that groups knew in advance what guidelines needed to be followed, to manage expectations. A degree of flexibility would be required, with potentially many groups coming forward, with varying experiences, and it would be essential that Councillors worked together across wards.

In answer to a question regarding improvements to pedestrian crossings, officers advised that if there were groups that wished to support projects that would be delivered by the Borough or County Council, or other statutory groups then that could be supported provided it was linked to the development, whilst ensuring that it could not be developed through the Strategic CIL fund.

Clarification was sought as to whether bids could be made to improve Council owned facilities and what the timescales were for the projected CIL figures. Officer confirmed that there would be no conflict of interest and as the local authority it would be expected, and in respect of the projected figures, it was very difficult to estimate, given the uncertainty of when developments would commence. Officers confirmed that allocations were only made with monies already collected. It was noted that the current uncertain financial times were adding to the complexity, with some developers waiting longer before starting developments.

In answer to a question regarding the publication and distribution of the forms, officers confirmed that there was no reason why Ward Councillors could not

have the forms in advance of them being made more widely available.

Members of the Group agreed that it would be helpful to have a two week window, to allow Ward Councillors to start the process within their communities, before it was published more widely. In that way, forms could be submitted for officers to consider before the next meeting in February.

In answer to a question regarding payments once a project was approved, officer advised that this would need to be considered going forward on an individual basis.

A member of the Group stated that some groups might struggle to provide proof such as invoices, before asking for money to be paid, depending on the nature of the project and the Director of Finance and Corporate Services advised that appropriate controls had to be in place to manage any risks; however, the circumstances surrounding each application would be considered sympathetically by officers. In response, a member of the Group suggested that it was made clear in the guidance that invoices might be required.

The Chairman reiterated the importance of moving this forward, completing forms, and having them ready for consideration at the meeting in February, to highlight that CIL money was being spent.

In answer to a question regarding possible deadlines for spending funding received, officers advised that there was no deadline; however, if it became obvious that a project was no longer viable, then the offer of funding could be rescinded, although it was likely that timescales would be generous. Also, the Council could request the return of any identified unspent money received by parish councils after five years. It was hoped that a pipeline of projects would come forward, and there would be a natural phasing of funding.

RESOLVED that:

1. EOI forms be distributed to Councillors two weeks before being published on the website along with appropriate guidance and ensure this is published via the Council's media channels; and
2. the next meeting of the Group be arranged for the end of February 2023, where the submitted projects and those approved for prospective CIL funding will be discussed.

4 Budget Update

The Service Manager – Finance delivered a presentation to the Group, which provided an update on the West Bridgford Special Expenses – 2023/24 Budget Session.

The presentation covered:

- Discussion topics
- West Bridgford budget

- Variances
- Historical comparison of figures
- Parish comparison
- Pressures
- Community Halls
- Events
- Options
- Capital
- Special Expenses – Annuity charges
- Council Tax and Special Expense – other points to note
- Summary

In respect of pressures and minimising promotion charges going forward, the Communities Manager advised that considerable work had been undertaken to promote the venues, with all the facilities now on-line and charges being increased next year. Energy audits were being undertaken on all facilities to improve carbon reduction and energy usage.

In answer to a question regarding the re-valuation of Business Rates, the Service Manager – Finance confirmed that in respect of Council owned facilities, it had been flagged as a risk, as the outcome was unknown. The Director – Finance and Corporate Services confirmed that in the last re-valuation, West Bridgford received higher valuations due to the area, so this was a risk, which might be mitigated by Government transitional arrangements.

In answer to a question regarding occupancy rates, the Communities Manager advised that all the Council's facilities were based on a 50% utilisation calculation, and it was currently running at about 41%, which meant that there was room for improvement, hence the initiatives to attract new customers and retain current ones.

In answer to a question regarding the ongoing and fit out costs of the Edwalton Community Hall, the Communities Manager advised that the costs were based on the operating model that would be run post development, and had been estimated at £38k, with an estimated annual income forecast of £10k; however, it was hoped that by filling an unmet demand, that could be higher. It was also envisaged that with an energy efficient building, energy bills would be smaller and therefore the £28k net cost would be a worst case scenario. In respect of fit out costs, those could be funded by CIL.

Concern was expressed by a member of the Group that the cost of the West Bridgford Christmas lights switch on at £40k was high, especially compared to other events and suggested that this should be scaled back and made as efficient as possible, as it was hard to justify that expenditure, in the current financial climate.

The Communities Manager advised that £12k was spent on the day itself, the rest of the money was allocated for the six to eight weeks of lighting, which included a healthy contingency to fix any faults with timers and lamp columns, which was part of the County Council's highways infrastructure, and old and prone to regular faults.

Members of the Group agreed that it was important to support local businesses and highlighted the importance of this event and acknowledged that local businesses had stated how much they valued it. In this post Covid era, the importance of supporting local businesses could not be underestimated, and this event was just one way of showing that support.

A member of the Group questioned if this expenditure should come from the Special Expenses budget, or the General budget, as it benefitted the entire Borough.

The Chairman advised that residents in many rural areas away from West Bridgford, would object to that suggestion, given that they were already paying for Christmas lights in their parishes through their own precepts.

A member of the Group mentioned that other local communities in West Bridgford might also wish to have their own Christmas events, and that could also be paid out of the Special Expenses budget.

The Communities Manager confirmed that officers provided considerable support for this event, which was very time consuming, and it was thought that having smaller events close by would lessen the sense of occasion, and therefore efforts were concentrated in the central designated town centre area.

A member of the Group noted that there was clearly support in other parts of West Bridgford for smaller events, or potentially just a Christmas tree, which would help to grow the wider economy. The Chairman suggested that Councillors could pay for a tree out of their Community Support Scheme allowance and the Communities Manager confirmed that a licence could be applied for from the Highway Authority to plug tree lights into the lighting infrastructure.

Members of the Group discussed the strain on finances and the Chairman referred to the 3.78% or £2.04 increase, which he considered good value given the circumstances. A member of the Group did mention that this was on top of an increase of 8.6% last year. It was noted that as presented, the increase over the last seven years was 1% per annum.

Two members of the Group stated that it would be preferable not to increase the Special Expenses precept at all, and that a thorough review should be undertaken as people were struggling financially and the Council might need to make the same tough decisions.

The Director – Finance and Corporate Services confirmed that the £2.04 increase would be minimal compared to the potential increases made by the County Council, given the size of the County Council precept, albeit they would no doubt have valid reasons for this. The Special Expenses budget was having to deal with financial pressures and given the rate of inflation, this increase was reasonable. Expenditure could be cut, although that would be likely to cause a diminution in service, and whilst it was acknowledged that people were struggling, £2.04 over a year was extremely small.

The Chairman advised that the precept for many villages was higher than that for West Bridgford, and the increase for everyone had been caused by various factors, including higher utility bills and pay increases. In an ideal world there would be no increase; however this was not possible, and the Group was reminded that this process did focus officer minds on how Councillors were thinking, and to ensure next year that again, that every penny was saved.

Members of the Group agreed that £2.04 seemed reasonable and good value for money, in particular given the quality of life enjoyed in Rushcliffe and the services that were delivered and bringing in footfall to a town in a post Covid world struggling with a recession. The feedback received from residents on those flagship events was excellent and if the investment stopped, residents would be the first to complain and the increase was justified.

A member of the Group suggested that next year it would be helpful to identify the impact of having no increase.

The meeting closed at 5.30 pm.

CHAIRMAN