

# Meeting of the Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee



SOUTH  
KESTEVEN  
DISTRICT  
COUNCIL

Tuesday, 3 May 2022, 10.30 am

Council Chamber - South Kesteven House,  
St. Peter's Hill, Grantham. NG31 6PZ

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## Committee Members present

Councillor Graham Jeal (Chairman)  
Councillor Gloria Johnson (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor John Dawson  
Councillor Ben Green  
Councillor Philip Knowles  
Councillor Charmaine Morgan  
Councillor Susan Sandall

## Other Members in attendance

Councillor Breda-Rae Griffin

## Cabinet Members in attendance

Councillor Kelham Cooke (Leader of the Council)  
Councillor Adam Stokes (Deputy Leader of the Council)  
Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew (Cabinet Member for Culture and Visitor Economy)

## Officers in attendance

Nicola M<sup>c</sup>Coy-Brown (Director of Growth and Culture)  
Graham Watts (Assistant Director of Governance)  
Richard Wyles (Chief Finance Officer)  
Jon Hinde (Head of Economic Development)  
Amy Pryde (Democratic Services Officer)

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## 59. Comments from members of the public

There were none.

## 60. Apologies for absence

No apologies for absence had been received.

#### **61. Disclosure of interests**

Councillor Ben Green declared that he was a full-time employee of the Woodland Trust.

#### **62. Action notes from Joint Scrutiny - Deepings Leisure Centre held on 30 November 2021**

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED**, that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

#### **63. Action notes of the meeting held on 22 February 2022**

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED**, that the action notes from the meeting held on 22 February 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

#### **64. Updates from previous meeting**

There were none.

#### **65. Grantham Future High Street Fund**

The Leader of the Council provided the Committee with a presentation that provided progress made since receiving the Future High Streets Fund (£5.56m) that had been awarded to the Council in April 2021. The Committee were reminded that the programme had been condensed into two and a half years.

Four key areas were highlighted on a map as part of the programme area:

- Station approach public realm (point A) – improved pedestrian and cycling access between the railway station and the town centre.
- Marketplace public realm (point B) – improvements to create an open space for events and as the focal point of the town.
- Strategic site acquisition (point C) – to enable station approach and mixed-use development of stage one.
- Delivery of a grant programme (point D) - to support the conversion of unused and underutilised upper floor retail space to residential accommodation.

It was highlighted that the draft delivery programme and public realm projects would be delivered alongside each other, between August and November 2023.

The Leader of the Council outlined the funding decision-making process, which included working partners involved.

The Council were contributing £379,000 as match-funding to develop events and promote the town, funding a new Grantham Engagement Manager who will bring stakeholders together to help support and promote the town. A group of the

stakeholders/shareholders would be brought together to form a town team, who would act as champions to the town.

It was noted that the Future High Street Funds board meet on a regular basis and would continue to engage with Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

One Member raised concerns in relation to the report:

- Clarification was sought on the boundary conversion on the upper floors and whether the Council or government rules determined the location.
- Concern over the multiple use and purpose of the market square and whether the alterations would be able to withstand the weight of vehicles transporting fairground rides.
- Concern on why the proposals set out in the report did not reflect the findings of the workshops run by Invest SK Ltd and what evidence supported the proposed changes.
- Concern over Grantham's busy nightlife and the proposed plans for residential accommodation on upper levels above shops and how this would be managed.
- Concern over a redevelopment area and the need for more parking spaces in Grantham.

The Leader of the Council clarified some queries raised by a member:

- That the upper-level accommodation government rules were centred around the centre of any town. Grantham's town centre was large and could reduce in size to drive up the quality in a defined area.
- A meeting was due to take place to discuss the scheme that may prohibit or cause impact on the mid-lent fair or other events in the marketplace. The weight on the road surface was being explored.
- That the Council were working within the rules for the scheme that the government had set out in relation to public feedback.
- That the empty units to residential along Westgate could receive noise surveys if any noise concerns arose.
- That Grantham train station had excess parking at the present time.

The Head of Economic Development clarified that upper floor conversions were favourable of property owners, and the grant provided met the viability gap of concern in the past.

One Member queried how the number of passengers coming into Grantham per year had recovered from Covid. Further clarification was sought on the reason for people coming into Grantham.

A further concern was raised on the lack of information provided around transport and the work around encouraging people to travel to Grantham from the South of the District by public transport.

The Leader of the Council highlighted that the fund was addressing the five-arm junction and the marketplace. Lincolnshire County Council would be responsible for active travel to and around Grantham and explore non-car traffic. It was noted that bus links from Bourne to Grantham were poor.

He confirmed that LNER would provide statistics of the number of passengers coming into Grantham via train, however the numbers were not back at pre-pandemic levels as of yet.

The Head of Economic Development emphasised that people commute from places coming in and out of Grantham and it should be encouraged for them to visit the town centre.

Another Member reassured that Stamford had a large night-time economy and that a high number of people live in the centre of Stamford. It was highlighted that the night-time economy also brings people into the centre of the town.

One Member raised a query on why the shopping complex was due to be built out of town, when encouraging people to attend the centre of town. A further question was raised on why funding had not been considered for the other three towns in South Kesteven.

The scheme had been based on the metrics and information available, with Grantham being the only town that the Council could bid for funding for, and other towns were not eligible within the governments scheme.

It was highlighted that the Council was ambitious to use the UK shared prosperity funding (£3.8m) across the towns in the district.

The Leader of the Council noted that the Council had made a planning decision on the shopping complex and that shops that were due to open in the shopping complex would never open in Grantham town centre.

It was further highlighted that the Council were working with Historic England on the Historic Shop-front scheme which would restore the aesthetics of shop fronts.

One Member raised a query on the funding multipliers and what the projected return would be from for every pound spent. Further clarification was sought on how the funding would increase footfall over the years.

The Head of Economic Development noted that the current statistics show an indication of the increase of footfall in years to come. The Future High Street fund output and input would be measured more on job creation and safeguarding, and less on return on investment.

It was suggested that an update be brought back to the Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in a few months' time.

The Chairman suggested for Committee Members to participate in a walking tour of Grantham to understand locations of where the Future High Street Funding would be utilised.

Further clarification was sought on the difference between the Future High Streets Fund and the Heritage Action Zone.

The membership of the Future High Streets Fund Board was queried.

The Chairman raised concern on the funding and how much would be used for consultants rather than improvements to the town centre and how this would be monitored.

The lack of trees and soft landscaping within Grantham town centre was emphasised due to public feedback.

Queries were raised in relation to the town centre team and whether a comms strategy was in place to engage and involve the community.

It was suggested that future reports could include definitions of success and what parallels the Council are aspiring to achieve of other towns.

The Head of Economic Development clarified the points questioned:

- That additional funding was provided by government for work undertaken by consultants, so the funding (£5.56m) would be spent on the program, conversions, and public highways.
- Grantham Heritage Action Zone was £1.2m to improve the quality of the heritage offered within the town and could only be spent on buildings that predate 1936.
- The Heritage Action Zone and Future High Street Fund boards were merged due to the close working links between the two. The membership of the board consisted of: Councillor Kelham Cooke, Councillor Adam Stokes, Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew, The Head of Economic Development, program managers responsible for delivery, Chief Executive, Director of Growth and Culture and a representative from Historic England.
- Partnership working was undergoing with London and Continental Railways to explore opportunities for the train station from a private public sector investment.
- That the Council require to work with Lincolnshire County Council in regard to trees and soft landscaping.

## **ACTION:**

**For the Head of Economic development to invite all Members for a walking tour of Grantham to understand the locations and how the funding would be utilised in the town centre.**

Concerns were raised over Lincolnshire County Council's responsibilities of the town relating to highways, signage and cleanliness.

The Leader of the Council highlighted that the shared prosperity funding was based around revenue spending rather than capital spending. The Council could work with local stakeholders to utilise the funding on an enhanced cleaning mechanism of the towns.

Concerns were raised in relation to the priorities of Lincolnshire County Council regarding trees. It was noted that historically, Grantham had been tree-lined on the high street and London Road.

Reassurance was requested that there would not be detrimental impact on any existing historic architecture for the proposed redevelopments.

A concern was raised on feedback received from public in relation to access to public toilets and on street lighting for public safety.

It was suggested that an information session on the overall strategy would be helpful.

Marketing and enforcement could be used within the scheme to encourage people from other areas to visit.

The Leader of the Council noted that greening of Grantham town centre would improve air quality, aesthetics and mental health. It was confirmed that historic buildings would not be detrimentally impacted by the scheme.

£160,000 had been funded by the government for the changing places scheme to improve the ability for elderly, teens and adults to have a changing place in the town centre. The public toilets were also being refurbished in the Guildhall.

It was highlighted that lighting areas in the town centre would be a responsibility for Lincolnshire County Council and that the Council would support traditional street lighting, rather than unattractive aluminium poles.

The Council had been working closely with Lincolnshire County Council on the Future High Streets Fund bid.

A suggestion was made that signage could be on paving slabs to make navigation easier for certain amenities for 'on-foot' visitors.

**AGREED:**

- a) **That the Committee notes the progress made in the delivery of the Future High Streets Fund programme for Grantham.**
- b) **That an update report is considered within 12 months and that this be included in the Work Programme.**

**66. Local Authority Search Figures**

The Assistant Director of Governance presented the report that outlined an update following a previous report in September 2021, where the average search was at a 22-day average turnaround time and at the highest figure of 32 days.

It was reported that the performance had significantly improved in Land Charges. From September 2021 to February 2022, the department's performance was below the 10-day target set as an authority. It was noted that external resource was utilised to address the significant backlog, which was ceased in December 2021.

Since December 2021, the Land Charges team consisted of two full-time equivalent posts. An additional resource was required within the team, which was set out as part of the Councils budget setting. The additional resource recruitment had closed, and interviews would be undertaken for 1.5 full-time equivalent posts imminently.

In March 2022, the turnaround time had exceeded the 10-day target due to annual leave within the team and a spike in searches received.

The Assistant Director of Governance reassured the Committee that once the team had been adequately resourced, the performance would continue to improve.

Members congratulated officers on their hard work on reducing the turnaround time for searches.

A query was raised on how long external resources were used for.

It was confirmed that external resources were in place for 3 months.

The Committee did not require any further monitoring on this matter.

**AGREED:**

- a) **That the Committee notes the update regarding Local Authority searches.**
- b) **That the Committee considers whether any further monitoring or update reports are required.**

**67. Work Programme 2021 - 2022**

The Committee noted the contents of the Work Programme 2021 – 2022.

A suggestion was made on whether the Committee could be provided with interim targets to monitor the budget and performance measures throughout the year.

The Chairman highlighted that the comments made at a previous meeting, were around the higher-level budget monitoring issues.

**68. Any other business, which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstance decides is urgent**

There were none.

**69. Close of meeting**

The Chairman closed the meeting at 11:45.