

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Confidential Report of a Meeting of the Seaton Regeneration Programme Board held at Seaton Town Hall, Seaton, on Wednesday 12 May 2010

Present:

Councillors: Ray Franklin (Chairman)
Stephanie Jones
Ian Thomas

Seaton Town Council: Councillor John Meakin

Other Members: Edward Willis Fleming – Axe Riverside Co.
Amanda Newsome – Natural England

EDDC Officers: Donna Best – Principal Estates Surveyor
Nigel Harrison – Economic Development Manager
Karime Hassan – Corporate Director
Nick Stephen – Communications Officer
Rachel Perram – Democratic Services Officer

DCC Officer: Steve Turner – Economic Development Manager

Apologies:

Councillors: Dennis Hall – Axmouth PC
Jim Knight
David Mears – Town Clerk
Andrew Moulding

Jenny Nunn – Seaton Tramway
Ian Harrison - DCC

The meeting started at 2.05pm and finished at 4.20pm.

72 **Report of the meeting of the Programme Board held on 17 February 2010**

The notes were confirmed as a true record.

Members noted that Margaret Rogers had resigned as Ward Member for Seaton.

*73 **Matters Arising**

Town Centre Manager (Minute *64 refers)

Members were reminded that the funding streams for this role came from three sources: EDDC, DCC and Section 106 Agreement funding from the Tesco land deal. The land deal funding was not available at present and although EDDC had offered to temporarily bridge the gap in funding and had offered £10,000, Seaton Town council were not happy to progress until the Tesco deal was in place.

RESOLVED that the recruitment of a Town Manager be delayed until the land deal with Tesco is secured.

Future of current Tourist Information Centre (TIC) building (minute *68 refers)

Members noted that Jenny Nunn of Seaton Tramway had objected strongly to the old TIC building being used for any purpose than to offer tourist information.

On-Street Parking Charges (minute *71 refers)

Members received a copy of a letter received from DCC regarding proposed on-street parking charges for Seaton. Members were advised that DCC officers were talking to DCC Jim Knight over seafront parking charges. Parking charges would be advertised in June, with objections being heard at a meeting scheduled for 5 July.

74 Ian Broadfoot, new Project Manager

Members were advised that Ian Broadfoot, who had recently been recruited as the new Project Manager for the Visitor Centres in Exmouth and Seaton, had resigned from his post. It was understood that he had been offered a permanent position at another Council in Devon.

75 Axe Wetlands Project

Members received an update from Kate Tobin, Axe Wetlands Project Co-ordinator, on the project. Planning approval had been granted for access to the Black Hole Marsh, meaning that paths could be laid. A cap of £160,000 had been put on funding for infrastructure works - the team was exploring other funding streams to complete the works required.

Members heard that progress with land owner negotiations for the middle piece of land in the proposed tidal wetland for the Axe estuary had stalled and that it seemed unlikely that a land deal would proceed, despite further negotiations that had proposed continued farming on the land. DCC were still in negotiation for a cycle way connection through the same piece of land.

The Chairman acknowledged that there had been difficult times in the regeneration for Seaton and the Wetlands project was a key draw for visitors to Seaton. Members agreed that a completed tidal wetland would become a spectacular site for diverse wildlife, agreeing that the Board would push for progress on this pivotal project for Seaton.

Edward Willis-Fleming suggested that a charity called the 'Friends of the Axe Wetlands' be formed to encourage publicly donated funds for the project. This would then belong to the community rather than being an EDDC driven project. This idea was backed by Kate Tobin, who saw this as a possible long term solution. Members were reminded of the success of Clinton Devon Estate's 'Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust'.

RESOLVED

1. that a report be prepared by Kate Tobin for the next Board meeting outlining all options for the tidal wetlands project.
2. that an options paper be prepared and presented by lawyers Bond Pearce for the Board's consideration.

Donna Best advised Members that the Council had negotiated a concession with Seaton Tramway over the hides at Seaton Marsh. EDDC had agreed to give the company a piece of track-side land that would enable land stabilisation works to be carried out.

76 Visitor Centre update

Members were advised that at the time of the meeting, the architects had not submitted a re-design within the budget of £2.2 million – a much diminished budget to the one previously envisaged.

Visitor Centre update (cont'd)

Karime Hassan asked the Board to consider the Visitor Centre project, particularly with regard to how the dynamics had changed since the original concept.

Both visitor centres at Seaton and Exmouth were now being purely driven by EDDC and DCC. Originally these projects were backed by strategic partnerships that involved many organisations - with accompanying funding streams and experience in these types of projects. However, due to shifts in the economic climate, coupled with the loss of the Project Manager, it was now the case that the projects were being driven by Councils that did not necessarily have the skills or resources to deliver successful long term commercial ventures of this type. Such ventures should be run on commercial basis (albeit with charitable status) with the buildings being constructed by the Councils and let as going concerns.

It was felt that the buildings were in danger of being compromised in their construction and quality of finish due to a lack of external support. Originally the Council had been informed that a key task of the Board that was established was to raise funding from private sector sources, this no longer seemed to be happening.

Members heard that the Trust, set up to progress these centres, had a number of skilled and motivated members, but questions need to be put to the Board regarding revenue funding to cover the costs of the centre and its capability to deliver the visitor experience sought by the stakeholders.

Members discussed the role of the World Heritage Coast team. It was clear that support was being provided for a learning centre in Lyme Regis, but as yet, little evidence of assistance or guidance was forthcoming for the two proposed centres in East Devon. It was agreed that the World Heritage Coast should be treated as a unit, with visitors being attracted along the coast to centres with their own unique selling point. Board Members heard that Hugo Swire, MP for East Devon, had entered into discussion with the Natural History Museum, who, it was understood, were keen to have an outpost and would be prepared to supply knowledge, guidance and display materials for a learning experience centre.

The fundamental requirement for the Regeneration Board was to seek reassurance from the Visitor Centre Trust Board that it was capable of running the centre and that it had the right skills and resources to convince EDDC of its business case prior to contracts being entered into for the construction of the building.

RESOLVED

That the Visitor Centre Trust Board be invited to attend a special meeting convened by EDDC to satisfy the Council that the Board is in a position to: appoint a project officer; to fund raise for the centre to deliver a world class experience; that it has a viable business plan; and that it will be capable of discharging the revenue obligations on the Board in running the Centre; and that representatives of the World Heritage Coast Team, Devon County Council and Exmouth and Seaton Regeneration Programme Boards be invited to attend the meeting.

77 Tesco Progress Report

In the absence of representation from Tesco, Donna Best advised Members that the Section 106 Agreements were almost agreed and that the recreation contributions were being completed in addition.

Tesco Progress Report (cont'd)

With regard to the fill for the land levels, Members heard that a planning application was due at EDDC on 27 May with a view to be considered by Committee in August.

Cllr Ian Thomas advised Members that Axmouth Parish Council had met with Tesco to discuss the impact of vehicle movements upon the village. It was recognised that construction traffic and delivery vehicles would struggle to use the narrow bottleneck that existed in the village. Residents were generally concerned over the long term impact of construction on villagers and that the road in the village was hazardous to the type of traffic needed. The Council would need to work with Tesco to prepare a manageable project plan for Seaton and Axmouth.

78 Former TIC Building

Kate Tobin advised Members that a plan had been proposed to use the former TIC building as a temporary Interpretation Centre for the Axe Wetlands as 2010 had been designated as the International Year of Biodiversity. The building will also be available to the Visitor Centre Trust to keep visitors and residents alike up to date with the project. The Countryside Team had spoken to a number of organisations in the area, whose preference was to see the building in use, than be boarded up over the summer period.

The proposal was to open the centre at the end of May for 3-4 days per week. Volunteers were already available to man the exhibition, that was wall mounted and grant funded. Jenny Nunn of Seaton Tramway, who was previously against the building being used for other purposes, had agreed that it would be better to have the building used than to stand empty, prior to demolition. The temporary nature of the exhibition meant that it would be easy to dismantle should the building need to be vacated at short notice.

In anticipation of queries over Seaton's regeneration, information leaflets were in the process of being developed that could be given to members of the public.

Members felt that this proposal would be very positive for the promotion of the town's natural resources.

79 Communication Messages

Members heard that EDDC had received two press enquiries about Seaton following an article in The Guardian on 5 May that featured the Town Mayor, Sandra Semple, and what were described as 'Tesco Towns'. These journalists had been provided with recent positive press releases about the town as well as information on the regeneration, the Wetlands project and the visitors' centre.

80 Any other business

Members heard that Neil Parish, MP had said that he wanted to make Seaton his number one priority.

RESOLVED that Neil Parish MP be invited to become a Member on the Seaton Regeneration Programme Board.

81 Dates of future meetings

Special Joint Meeting of the Seaton and Exmouth Regeneration Programme Boards – June 2010

Thursday 19 August 2010 at 2.00pm
Thursday 18 November 2010 at 2.00pm