

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Strategy and Resources Committee held in the Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Monday, 2nd December, 2024 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor Clayton (Chair)

Councillors Crabb, D Knight, R Knight, Lane, C Leaver, P Leaver, Maskell and Prowse

Officers:

Chief Executive, Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Customer Focus and Senior Solicitor and Monitoring Officer and Service Lead Affordable Housing

Councillors also present in person: Maddocks, Norman and Patrinos

80. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bell, Hunt, Milton and Wilkinson.

81. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 NOVEMBER 2024 (ATTACHED).

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2024 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

82. ITEMS BROUGHT FORWARD WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR SHOULD BE CONSIDERED BY THE MEETING AS A MATTER OF URGENCY.

There were no items which in the opinion of the Chair should be considered urgently.

83. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS.

Councillor P Leaver declared a non-registrable interest in item 6, Landmark Theatres Update, as historically his company worked for the Landmark.

84. LANDMARK THEATRES UPDATE

The Committee received an update on the Landmark Theatres.

The Head of Place, Property and Regeneration introduced Paul Jepson, CEO and Creative Director, Victoria Yates, Head of Finance and Ben Lyons-Ross, Head of Talent and Participation from the Landmark Theatre who were going to give an update to the Committee.

The Council entered into a contract with the Landmark theatres to operate the Landmark in Ilfracombe and the Queens theatre in Barnstaple in 2019. North Devon Council Officers met monthly with the theatre company and received quarterly monitoring reports as well as an annual report. It continued to be a challenging time for the sector but they continued to do well. Works had recently been completed to the Queens Theatre roof and Landmark Theatre fire alarm system and funding bids had recently been submitted for upgrades to the heating system at the Landmark.

Mr Jepson began the presentation by explaining that the Arts Council part funded the organisation. The Landmark was a new addition to the Arts Council portfolio and that the Landmark were situated across two sites, one in Ilfracombe and the other in Peterborough.

The purpose of the organisation was to provide the highest quality theatre to the widest possible demographic in the least culturally engaged places in England.

- Outside of London, this sector had the lowest access to jobs and training.
- Access to the Arts was place based and this organisation looked to address that.
- Provision of effective training. The aspiration was to create jobs and training.
- The organisation were aware of the loneliness epidemic. They were working on the provision of theatre as a means to address this problem.
- There were two types of programme the Commercial and the Curated.
- There had been some success in attracting weeklong commercial productions. The biggest difficulty attracting companies to visit the area was the lack of sale of tickets.
- They had been fortunate to partner with the National Theatre,
- A pantomime business had grown, which offered bespoke stage sets and this would be moving to the Queens theatre next year.

Victoria Yates the Head of Finance at Landmark theatres then updated the Committee as follows:

- She joined the company at the end of January 2024 and it became clear to her quickly that the business had many operational weaknesses.
- Working with HR finance processes had been put in place to create a more robust monitoring system.
- The business was in a deficit with a negative balance sheet of around £1.4million.
- A system called Lean in had been developed which looked at creating cost savings and efficiencies across the organisation.
- A Zero-based budgeting system had been introduced, with the aim to save £300 to £400,000 per annum on costs such as procurement.

- Other savings had been made by reducing the number of hours the box office was manned, automating processes where possible and by centralising marketing operations in Peterborough.
- Another improvement to the finances was parting ways with Selladoor who would be writing off a debt of £600,000.
- Aiming to be breaking even by the end of March 2025.
- Working hard to bring new audiences to the theatre, looking at ways to diversify their income by growing pantomime business. The venues would be available to hire commercially for other activities.
- It was hoped that by 31 March 2028 the balance sheet would be in a positive situation and in a position to invest in the infrastructure of the buildings.
- Now applying for charity status, which would open up the organisation to be eligible to apply for funding streams otherwise unavailable.

Ben Lyons-Ross then presented his segment as follows:

- His main area of work was involved in training and skills and the development of participation.
- As part of the Participation Strategy a schools partnership programme was in place, five secondary schools and four primary schools from North Devon had been involved.
- Around 400 workshops were delivered to the schools and enabled close to 1,200 young people to perform on the stage.
- A community Decision Makers panel had been set up and the purpose of the group was to scrutinise the programme and decide on whether it was relevant to and of interest to the local community.
- To address the difficulty of engaging with the 16-25 year old age group the organisation had broadened the skills training available.
- Successful British Film Institute (BFI) funding had allowed the introduction of an Academy short course programme providing hands on training and experience in filmmaking.
- There was a large number of applicants to take part in this course and the number who were successful covered a number of protected characteristics such as having a disability, being female and coming from a working class background.
- A flagship event the 'Welcome Weekender' held in September was a festival to welcome new artists and performers into the building on their own terms.
- The event generated around £140,000 income to the area and created paid work opportunities and work experience shadowing opportunities for a number of young people and adults over the weekend.
- The event had a beneficial impact on the area.
- Arty Bank was a new initiative being created which took its premise from Multibank, a social initiative providing poverty relief by way of connecting companies with surplus goods to local charities and care professionals who then distribute those goods.
- The Arty bank would offer similar provision but alongside this would be a 'free at the point of access' offer tied into the service.
- Collaborations with local community groups such as Action for Children, North Devon Homes, Sunrise Diversity, Encompass Southwest and Age Concern were underway to help tackle issues such as social isolation.

- The ambition was to make the theatre a hub for community inclusion.

The Committee then asked questions and received the following replies:

- A lot of work was carried out in schools and issues young children were struggling with were creatively dealt with through the participation programme.
- The organisation was not aware of any programming duplications in the area.
- The charitable status would help significantly with funding opportunities.
- Any opportunities to advertise in public spaces was welcomed. The Head of Place, Property and Regeneration added that the team were working with the Landmark on a marketing strategy.
- Selladoor were now a relatively small organisation and splitting from them would strengthen the Landmark's financial position.
- In relation to lack of skills in the technical theatre production, this would be addressed by the introduction of a technical theatre qualification.
- In terms of reconnecting the two theatres in North Devon with the local community, the new Arty Bank project was an attempt to place the theatre and arts in the centre of the community.

85. AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE PRESENTATION

The Committee received an update on the AONB Management Plan.

The Head of Place, Property and Regeneration introduced Jenny Carey-Wood from the AONB who gave a presentation as follows:

- The organisation had been rebranded and were now known as North Devon Coast National Landscape.
- They covered a large geographical area from the top of North Devon down to the Cornish border with approximately 10,000 inhabitants.
- The Biosphere Partnership dealt with the marine life and conservation.
- The purpose of the ND Coast National Landscape was to conserve and enhance natural beauty.
- Natural Beauty being the Landscape, Geology, Wildlife and Cultural Heritage.
- The organisation was overseen by a partnership of 26 members from Torridge District Council, North Devon Council, Devon County Council, Natural England, Historic England, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Exmoor National Park, North Devon Biosphere, Coastwise North Devon, Devon Wildlife Trust, National Farmers Union, Tarka Country Trust, National Trust, Taw Torridge Estuary Forum, Country Landowners and Business Association, The Countryside Charity (CPRE Devon) and 8 Community Representatives.
- There was a core team of three staff, one of whom was part time working on the following areas:
 - Planning advice to Local Authority planning teams
 - Promotion, engagement, connection and volunteering
 - Landowner engagement for Nature, Climate, People and Place
 - Heritage and Culture
 - Project Development/Funding opportunities
 - Grant Management; and

- Review of the AONB Management Plan
- The review of the Management plan was carried out every five years and the current plan covered 2019 – 2024, extended to 2025 was being reviewed
- Material consideration was given to the Local Plan when considering the Management plan
- A consultation was currently live and had so far had over 360 responses
- A draft of the new Management plan would be formally consulted on in May 2025
- Final sign off by Local Planning Authorities and Natural England to take place July to December 2025.
- Recent changes included the Protected Landscapes Review 2019 – during which the idea to rebrand came about.
- Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 Targets, Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework and the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, which gave a revised duty of regard – ‘to seek to further the statutory purposes of protected landscapes’. Clarification from Government was still to be given on how this would be carried out.
- **Core Budget:**
 - 75% Defra and 25% local planning authorities
 - £16,770 NDC contribution
 - £245,858 Defra, DCC & TDC (& revenue uplift)
- **Additional Funds leveraged:**
 - £303,549 Farming in Protected Landscapes
 - £83,349 Access for All and Capital uplift grants
 - £85,258 Finding Nature’s Footprints (National Lottery)
- **£734,774 Total.**
- The total of £6million funding from Government was split between the 34 National Landscape Partnerships across England.
- Funding had been received to be used in farming and protected landscapes, this was not in relation to food production
- The current project of ‘Finding Natures Footsteps’ was focussing on Berryarbor, Combe Martin and Ilfracombe.

In response to questions from the Committee the following replies were given:

- The organisation were not a statutory consultee in terms of planning authorities but they did offer advice to responsible authorities.
- The AONB were supportive of Community Land Trust’s working to get the balance right when it came to new development.
- In terms of social subscribers the AONB did not own or manage any land. It could be very challenging to set up, people didn’t like going to an area they were unfamiliar with and transport was always a problem.
- Having met with farmers one of the things they expressed as something they would like to see was more education around food production, to help aid peoples understanding of restrictions to access to land during certain times of the year.
- Devon County Council were in the process of updating their guidance on renewable energy sources across Devon.

86. MATERIAL RECOVERY FACILITY INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATE

The Committee received an update on the Material Recovery Facility Infrastructure project.

The Head of Environmental Enhancement gave the following update:

- A completion inspection meeting had been carried out on Friday 29 November 2024.
- A small number of jobs were to be carried out week commencing 9 December 2024, but otherwise the works were now complete.
- The jobs included lifting two racks of lights in the processing hall to allow better clearance for vehicles and the new baler.
- The concrete slab, for the glass bay floor, had been poured last Friday and was being monitored to ensure it was going off in time for the concrete bunker walls to be reinstated.
- As soon as this was cured and dry a CCTV camera, carbon monoxide monitor and an extractor fan could also be fitted using a scissor lift.
- The baler kit was due to arrive 20 December 2024 and there would be specialist contractors arriving to assemble the equipment in January 2025.
- The Head of Environmental Enhancement gave thanks to the works and recycling team especially yard staff and crews for dealing with the upheaval during the upgrade works and to the office support staff who had to relocate out of their office space during the works.

RESOLVED to give thanks to the works and recycling team who have coped with the upheaval of the works being carried out without disruption to service provided to the community.

87. PROCUREMENT OF PUBLIC ART (CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT FUND PROJECT)

The Committee considered a report by the Culture Manager (circulated previously) regarding Procurement of Public Art (Cultural Development Fund project).

The Culture Manager highlighted the following:

- Flourishing Barnstaple, a North Devon Council initiative aimed at revitalising the town through arts and culture, was commissioning public art installations for Barnstaple town centre.
- The programme was funded through the Cultural Development Fund, delivered by Arts Council England on behalf of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and included a number of individual permanent artworks in specific locations, for example sculpture or land art.
- The value of the contract was £200,000 to be awarded to one or several artists depending on the detailed designs submitted through the tender process.
- The process for selecting artworks had already begun with the Town Team for Culture Public Art subgroup.

- To ensure delivery within the funded period we had to select artists to work up their designs in December 2024, for full tender in February 2025 and 12 months for delivery.
- A Call Out to Artists was put out through local, national and international networks, resulting in over 100 enquiries for details of the commission and over 60 completed Expressions of Interest.
- Ten bursaries of £500 would be allocated to allow artists to work up their proposals.
- Selection would be made by the Town Team for Culture Public Art Subgroup, which comprised artists, community representatives and businesses who had been involved in the process of setting themes and locations for the artworks, and who were best placed to comment on artistic quality and suitability.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the full requirements of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules be waived so;
- (b) That access to the tender opportunity for public art for Barnstaple Town Centre be restricted to 10 artists, selected on the basis of the quality of their previous work and any other suitability criteria proportionate to this contract.

88. APPROVAL AND RELEASE OF S106 PUBLIC OPEN SPACE FUNDS - TARKA LEISURE CENTRE, BARNSTAPLE

The Committee considered a report by the Parks, Leisure and Public Open Space Officer (circulated previously) regarding Approval and Release of S106 Public Open Space Funds – Tarka Leisure Centre, Barnstaple.

The Head of Environmental Enhancement highlighted the following:

- Additional funding was being sought to add a section of path that would link to the rear of Tarka Leisure Centre. This footpath would allow users easy and safe access to the leisure facilities from the new long stay car park. The proposed path was subject to planning approval.

The Head of Environmental Enhancement gave the following replies to questions:

- He was not aware of any objections to the location of this particular stretch of proposed path.
- A driver to put this access path in was to help avoid members of the public tracking across the land adjacent to the artificial pitch and taking mud through the leisure facilities.
- The cost given for the works was an estimate.
- With the car park due to open in the new year getting the path in as soon as possible was optimal.

The Chief Executive added that if the route of the path was altered there would likely be additional costs and so would therefore come back to Committee for consideration.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That £65,000 be allocated to construct a new cycle and pedestrian path; in consultation with the Roundswell Ward Members on the location of the path;
- (b) That the outcomes of the Equality Impact Assessment as summarised in paragraph 6 of the report be noted; and

RECOMMENDED:

- (c) That Council vary the capital programme by £65,000 and that funds be released to deliver the project; subject to consultation with the Roundswell Ward members on the location/route of the pathway.

89. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS AND RESTRICTION OF DOCUMENTS

RESOLVED:

- (a) That, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item as it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of the Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended from time to time)), namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information); and
- (b) That, all documents and reports relating to the item be confirmed as “Not for Publication”.

90. ACQUISITION OF LAND FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Councillor Crabb declared a non-registrable interest in the item as he worked as a sub-contractor to the main contractor employed by the land developer.

The Committee considered a report by the Service Lead Affordable Housing (circulated as a restricted document previously) regarding Acquisition of Land for Affordable Housing.

The Service Lead Affordable Housing Officer gave highlights from her report to the Committee, who then debated the merits of the acquisition and questioned the Officer on the technicalities of the development of the site.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the acquisition of land for affordable housing by North Devon Council be approved as set out in Section 4, option 3 of the report subject to consideration being limited to £1 and subject also to the necessary and appropriate variation being made to any relevant planning obligations and a suitable arrangement being made which did not preclude funding from Homes England; and
- (b) That the outcomes of the Equality Impact Assessment as summarised in Section 6 of the report had been considered.

Chair

The meeting ended at 12.15 pm

NOTE: These minutes will be confirmed as a correct record at the next meeting of the Committee.