

District Council Report for HTC

April 2023

In lots of ways, it has been a challenging year for the district council again. Inflation and increases in interest rates have hit the budget hard. We managed to balance the budget by using some of the general reserve but this is not something that can be relied on every year so some difficult decisions will have to be made.

Officers have been reviewing all the council's projects. In the case of Highview which was to have been a development of 25 new homes for affordable rent and five for shared ownership – all net zero carbon in use – the project has been paused and will be reconsidered when the financial outlook is more positive. Officers have been asked to explore the possibility of selling the site. This is really disappointing as I think all members were very supportive of this project.

Another project that has been paused due to financial problems is the Princes Parade project. So far £5.1m has been spent on it. In December cabinet agreed to do just the work necessary to implement the planning permission. Earlier this year a private developer made an offer to acquire and develop the land. Officers have been instructed to consider the matter and potential next steps, but no further report has been published about this.

One piece of good news is that the District Council had been awarded £19,791,819 levelling up money to deliver the plans for Folkestone Town Centre. The project must be delivered by 31 March 2025, so the timescale is very tight.

Outline planning permission for Otterpool Park was approved on 4 April.

There were hopes that there would be a collaboration with Homes England which would help to finance the necessary infrastructure. That is looking less likely now, so Otterpool LLP have submitted a business plan to the council with a request for a further lending facility of £80m. The council is currently carrying out due diligence on this. The council has also commissioned a review of governance of the project.

And finally, onto my own portfolio. We are continuing to work at reducing the carbon emissions of the council's own estate. We were awarded £1.9m from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to retrofit our least energy efficient council homes. And it has just been announced that we have been successful with our wave 2 bid for a further £2.6m. The council is using suitably qualified local contractors for some of the insulation work.

We have also started on a district wide carbon plan. We have set up the Carbon Innovation Lab where representatives of local businesses and environmental organisations get together and discuss ways of reducing the carbon emissions of the district as a whole. The council is only responsible for a very small proportion of those emissions so we will need to work in partnership with the local community.

A spin off from the CI Lab is the Sustainable Futures Forum. This is a project that has been encouraging local people to develop their own environmental projects. There will be an event at the Burlington Hotel in Folkestone on Saturday where some of the projects will be promoted via TedX style talks.