

STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL TO FULL COUNCIL – 23RD FEBRUARY 2022

Submitted by: Councillor Simon Tagg

Portfolio: All

Wards affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To provide an update to Members on the activities and decisions of Cabinet, together with the Forward Plan.

Recommendation

That the statement of the Leader of the Council be received and noted.

Reasons

To update Council Members on the activities and decisions of the Leader and Cabinet and to allow questions and comments to be made on the Statement.

1. Cabinet Meetings

A selection of decision and actions of Cabinet since the last Leader's Statement are detailed below.

2. Delivery of the Future High Street Fund (FHSF)

Cabinet has endorsed key parts of the FHSF plans for the Ryecroft which will include a new office headquarters, town centre living accommodation for older people, a replacement multi-story car park, and public open spaces.

Work began late last year on the demolition of the former Civic Offices to make way for the long-awaited redevelopment in the town centre.

Cabinet also agreed to acquire the York Place shopping arcade to enable the retail offer that links Ryecroft to the rest of the town centre to be reinvigorated.

3. Market Award

The resurgence of Newcastle's historic market continues. The monthly Artisan Market has been awarded a 'Highly Commended' in the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) awards. Congratulations to the markets staff and all those stallholders who work so hard to make the event markets an attraction for shoppers, residents and families.

Cabinet received a report in January that outlined future aspiration for the market including rolling out of more themed markets, continuation of the new traders £5 a stall discount and use of the Future High Street funding to further improve the market experience for visitors including a market, leisure and performance space to accommodate specialist events

4. **New owner of the Sky Building**

The Council is pressing for confirmation of when construction works will restart at the Sky Building and has requested immediate improvements in site safety, security and tidiness now that the site is under new ownership.

I have written to the new owner to ask that longstanding community concerns are urgently addressed

The Sky Building is a multi-storey student flats complex situated on the former Jubilee Baths site which was sold by the previous administration at Council in 2015. It should have opened in 2017 but work ground to a halt and there has since been a succession of legal issues surrounding ownership and investment.

It's my intention to share the developer's plans and timescales with residents and businesses as soon as I receive a response.

5. **Borough Local Plan Consultation**

The consultation on the Issues and Options stage of the Borough Local Plan has now been completed. A total of 13 public consultation events, including 3 virtual events, have been completed, despite the challenges of running Covid secure engagements. It should be noted that many Councils have run online only consultation for their local plan including Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

The consultation took place over 14 weeks in total, over double the length set in the Statement of Community Involvement, affording people good time to consider the material produced and to submit comments.

As well as welcoming written representations from consultees from the start, the Council has used a market-leading consultation tool for Local Plans, which provides a secure and efficient way to store and process comments made.

I would like to thank the Council's Planning Policy team for their work and engagement with the public during this process.

There are two further rounds of consultation included within the project plan for the Local Plan, so by the end of the process the public will have had three distinct formal opportunities to engage with the plan and provide comments to the Council.

Misinformation has circulated on social media about the validity of consultation, and it is disappointing that some Members of the Council have also spread this misinformation.

6. **Refurbishment of Kidsgrove Sports Centre**

As the £7.5million refurbishment of Kidsgrove Sports Centre reaches its final phase, the Council has now entered into a 25-year lease with Kidsgrove Sports Centre Community Group (CIO), enabling it to operate the centre which includes a 25m, six lane swimming pool; reception area, sports hall, enlarged gym, dance studio, spin studio and physio room and updated changing areas.

The CIO are finalising their plans to run the centre with the aim of opening to the public in summer 2022.

7. **Improvements to Westlands Sports Centre and Wolstanton Park Tennis Courts**

Cabinet has endorsed a bid to the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) for grant funding to upgrade Westlands Sports Centre and Wolstanton Park tennis courts. The LTA has identified Newcastle as one of their priority areas to increase participation in tennis and the Council has been working closely with them to identify opportunities for innovative improvements and enhanced access to the sport for residents.

The LTA have in principle agreed a grant of £133,700 which will be supplemented by £30,000 from the Council's capital programme for renovation of the courts, installation of a booking system and an ongoing promotion package. Use of both facilities will remain free to the public.

8. **Chatterley Valley**

More than 1,700 jobs are set to be created, and £60million in private sector investment brought into the borough, by the expansion of the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone at Chatterley Valley. The site is located just over a mile from Kidsgrove town centre and Cabinet approved £3.7million funding via the Kidsgrove Town Deal monies which will enable vital infrastructure to allow the huge project to commence.

9. **Community Renewal Fund**

The Council has been successful in a £235,000 bid to the Government's Community Renewal Fund for three projects associated with the Sustainable Environment Strategy: put together a business case for a solar generation project in the Borough, convert the Council's streetlight stock to Smart LED energy efficient lighting and explore options to replace fossil fuel heating system in community centres, sporting complexes and the Almshouses.

10. **Urban Tree Planting**

A further phase of tree planting is currently under way as part of Urban Tree Planting Strategy, this will be an area the size of ten football pitches planted by spring 2023.

Cabinet has designated 60 areas of Council-owned green space in the urban areas of the borough as Urban Carbon Capture Areas (UCCAs). These areas will be protected in the Open Spaces and Green Infrastructure Strategy and will be put forward for designation in the developing Local Plan. UCCA's will be safeguarded for future generations and for tree and shrub planting, meadow and species rich grassland creation.

11. **Recognition for Bereavement Service and Street Cleaning Service**

The Council's Cemetery and Crematorium Services has been declared Most Improved Performers in the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) national awards, winning their category, and the Street Cleansing Services were finalists in theirs, making the service part of the top eight in the UK.

This national recognition for our teams shows the quality of the service that is being provided to residents, especially during the coronavirus pandemic with the additional challenges which that has presented to frontline services areas.

12. **Guildhall renovation & Brampton Museum extension**

Two of the Borough's most historic and best loved buildings are back open to the public after receiving welcome renovations.

The Guildhall has a new-look reception and two new meeting rooms, redecorated walls and updated carpets making it more suitable for multiple use by organisations.

The Borough Museum now boasts a new gallery, event spaces, café and shop as part of £654,000 extension works completed just before Christmas.

13. **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan can be found at:-

<https://moderngov.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/mgListPlans.aspx?RPId=118&RD=0>

Councillor Simon Tagg
Leader of the Council