

Burgess Hill Town Council

PRESS RELEASE

13 JUNE 2022

Town Council pauses The Beehive project but announces proposals for Park Centre and St John's Pavilion Plan B

The following statement by Cllr Robert Eggleston, Leader of Burgess Hill Town Council, seeks to give an update on discussions to be held at the Strategic KAG on Friday 17 June, and his recommendation for future action by the Town Council.

“When the project for the building of the town’s new community centre and performing arts venue, which came to be known as The Beehive, began no-one could have predicted the unprecedented events that the world has witnessed over the last two years. The global pandemic and now the war in Ukraine has had a major disruptive effect on supply chains, the prices of goods and energy costs. We know from our own shopping baskets how we are being affected by the cost of living increases and the same effect is being seen in the commercial sector and causing an inflationary spiral. The Bank of England is trying to control inflation by increasing interest rates and these are heading to levels not seen for many years.

The Beehive was professionally costed in January 2019 at £5.5m and the Town Council obtained loan funding which, with other funds, meant the project could be delivered with some headroom to account for what would have been normal inflationary conditions. We always said that we would commission a further cost estimate nearer the point of construction and anticipated that costs would have risen. What we could not predict was the extent of the price increases in the construction sector. In late May our professional advisers presented a revised cost estimate which took the build cost to £9.4m. This, taken with the continued upward movement in interest rates, means that the Town Council has no alternative but to suspend The Beehive project at this time.

It is important in circumstances such as these that we adapt to events in a positive and constructive way

rather than give up. We are able to do that with two initiatives set out below.

As residents may be aware the Town Council is, with Sussex Clubs For Young People and Clarion Futures, the sole bidders to take over Park Centre from West Sussex County Council. A decision on the transfer of Park Centre is due within the next few weeks. Park Centre will provide a range of services and, whilst it will have an emphasis on youth services, it can be extended, refurbished and modernised and we shall do all we can to provide the facilities which would have been provided at The Beehive. Park Centre already has a theatre on the first floor, for example.

To further support the development of community facilities we will be considering how we can fund an extension of St John's Pavilion to support the aspirations and commitment to community development of the Burgess Hill Cricket Club.

The Town Council will be considering both of these proposals during June and July and if approved by Councillors will move quickly with our partners to bring these two projects forward. The cost of these two schemes, given the reduced building construction required, will be considerably less than envisaged for The Beehive with the consequence that any loan for the building cost will be substantially less as a result. Neither the Park Centre or St John's Pavilion were available options in 2019. Our involvement in redevelopment of St John's Pavilion will need the cooperation of Mid Sussex District Council.

The Beehive was scheduled as a 19 month building project commencing in spring 2023 with an opening date in late 2024. We see no reason why the projects for Park Centre and St John's Pavilion could not be completed within the same timeframe.

We know that this news about The Beehive will be disappointing to many people. I would like to thank everyone who has committed time and energy on this project and can assure you all that we will be looking at how we can best use the RBL site and Cyprus Hall in the future for community and cultural facilities. In the meantime we will be working as fast as we can to deliver the facilities destined for The Beehive at Park Centre and St John's Pavilion."

This recommendation will be considered by the Strategic KAG Committee on Friday 17 June, and will go on to the Finance KAG Committee, on Thursday 23 June, if approved.