

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE SERVICES POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 12 OCTOBER 2022

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillor Brice (Chairman), Mrs Gooch (Vice Chair), Brindle, Cannon, Cox, Harper, Hinder, English and Garten
Lead Members:	Councillor Perry (Lead Member for Corporate Services)

47. ARCHBISHOP'S PALACE

The Lead Member for Corporate Services introduced the report and explained that a six-month exclusivity agreement had previously been entered into with Balfour Hospitality, to enable a detailed proposal to be developed regarding the future use of Archbishop's Palace. To enable further work on the proposal, the Committee were asked to consider a three-month extension on the agreement, with the option to extend for a further two three-month periods if required. The aim was for the detailed proposal to be completed in early 2023.

The Committee agreed that developing the plan, including seeking planning permission as required, could be a lengthy process and agreed that the extension of the exclusivity agreement should be granted to allow this to be completed. Balfour Hospitality's interest in the site presented an opportunity for the town, and time to complete their detailed proposal should be given.

There were concerns surrounding the financial risk to the Council if either the plan submitted by Balfour Hospitality was rejected by the Council, or if Balfour Hospitality concluded that their original proposal was no longer viable following further investigations during the exclusivity period. In those situations, the building could be left empty for an extended period which would have a financial impact on the Council. Confirmation was requested that Balfour Hospitality would consult fully with local residents, and that the results of the consultation would be taken into account when developing their plan.

In response to the concerns raised, the Lead Member for Corporate Services felt confident that the experience and commitment demonstrated by Balfour Hospitality would lead to economic benefits for Maidstone and attract visitors to the town, and that concerns by local residents would be fully considered within the proposed plan.

The Director of Finance, Resource and Business Improvement added that the decision to grant the exclusivity agreement had been made by the former Policy and Resources Committee, and that the requested extension would allow the original aspirations of that agreement to be fulfilled. In response to further questions, it was clarified that Balfour Hospitality could apply for planning permission for the site, but would not be able to carry out any works unless their full proposal was considered by the Committee, and approved by the Executive.

Contingency planning would be undertaken if it became likely that a significant gap would occur between the date of the building being vacated by Kent County Council, and the date that the agreed developer would commence their management obligations of the building.

RESOLVED: to recommend to the Lead Member for Corporate Services that

1. The Exclusivity Agreement with Balfour Hospitality be extended for a further three months; and
2. Delegated authority be given to the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement to agree two further three-month extensions if required, in consultation with the Lead Member for Corporate Services.