

COUNCIL 20 JULY 2022

Item 15 - Questions

(1) Councillor P Williams question to Councillor N Mannion

Asked if the Council would consider applying for government funding available for the Brownfield Land Release Fund 2. In response, Councillor N Mannion, the Chair of the Economy and Growth Committee stated that in July the government announced the Brownfield Land Release Fund (BRLF2) which provided capital grant funding seeking to release land for new homes. The current application window was open to Mid-August and was valued at £40m out of a total fund of up to £180m over three years.

The Council's Economic Development and Housing teams were aware of the Fund and were considering it in comparison to the proposals. The Council was looking to ascertain whether any meet the bidding criteria. Councillor N Mannion stated that he would be happy to send a more substantive response to Councillor P Williams in writing detailing the exact dates and amounts.

Written Response

The One Public Estate Partnership announced on the 11 July 2022 that up to £180 million capital grant funding is available to all constituent English councils over a three-year period to support the release of council-owned brownfield land for the development of new housing. The BLRF2 will support the government's levelling up ambitions in places that need it and is aimed at restoring a sense of community and local pride and spreading opportunity across England so that every place can realise its potential.

This funding will be made available via three competitive bidding rounds:

- The first of these is currently open for applications and closes on the 19 August 2022, a total of £40m of funding has been allocated in round one.
- Round two is expected to be open for bids in 2023, with the bidding round closing early Spring 2023 and £60m of funding has been allocated; and
- Round three is expected to be open for bids in 2024, with the bidding round closing early Spring 2024 and up to £80 million of funding has been allocated.

What does BLRF2 mean for Cheshire East?

Across all three rounds of BLRF2, the fund places a large emphasis on places that are considered in need of levelling up and therefore areas with lower residential land values. Suggesting that in Cheshire East, developments would be confined to central Crewe and parts of Macclesfield, where the tartan rug clearly identifies concentrations of deprivation.

Cheshire East currently benefits from Housing Investment Fund (HIF) from Homes England for its three strategic housing sites (South Macclesfield

Development Area, Handforth Garden Village and Leighton). It is unclear from BLRF2 guidance if this new fund can be used in conjunction with HIF, and questions have been raised with government officials on this matter.

Officers are currently assessing the criteria for the fund and against sites already identified for housing development which are in the Council's ownership and examining whether the timescales and ambitions of the fund align with the Council's priorities for individual sites.

If the Council is not able to develop a bid by the deadline for the 2022 funding round, 19 August, it is likely to be developing its proposals for individual sites for Spring 2023.

(2) Councillor S Holland question to Councillor S Corcoran

Asked a question in respect of the New Burden Grant. She asked if the grant could be utilised to fund, reinstate, or replace via a similar service as the pathfinder service. Councillor S Corcoran, the Leader of the Council, requested for the question to be submitted in writing and he would provide a written response.

Written Response

Following the Council's decision there are no plans to re-commission the pathfinder service. The decision reflected the positive approach that is offered via the Live Well website where similar support is available ([Live Well Cheshire East](#)). The site is highly accessible, but CEC Libraries and the Contact Centre can also help customers who have difficulty completing forms online.

The New Burden Grant - (Incapacity Benefit Reassessment) is a specific grant from the DWP to fund the administration costs associated with reassessing Housing Benefit claims for those previously receiving Incapacity Benefit. As such it is compensation for costs incurred and the grant cannot therefore be utilised to fund other initiatives.

(3) Councillor J Bratherton question to Councillor N Mannion

Referred to a news release on 18 July 2022 in connection with an art project - the heritage wall proposed to be located outside of Crewe station. She wanted to know who made the decision to appoint the artist, what criteria was it based on and which other artists put in a piece of work for verification in order to obtain the contract? She found out about the vote on the 18th July with the ballot taking place only a few days later. She stated there were only two options on the voting paper, however she was of the view a third option needed to be put forward stating none of the above on. She felt both examples been offered bared no resemblance to Crewe. Further to this she would have liked to have some broader say within the Council on the designs signalled out. She reiterated who made the decision, how to chosen artist was appointed, the relevance of public art realm in the first place on the bus station and the cost.

In response, Councillor N Mannion, the Chair of the Economy and Growth Committee stated he would provide a written response.

Written Response

As part of the initial plans and discussion for phase one of the Royal Arcade (the new car park and bus station) the idea to incorporate some form of public art came up through comments made by the public and stakeholders. The use of a perforated aluminium design was identified by officers as a solution that would enable the incorporation of some public art, while also addressing the technical building control requirements of managing air to flow into the car park to provide both ventilation and fire prevention mitigations. This type of cladding/artwork has been used in other multi storey carparks and was included in the budget for the car park in Crewe. It was referenced in the hybrid planning application for the scheme, subject to a final design, which was awarded planning consent in September last year. The budget for the heritage wall, including the design, construction and installation of the cladding/ artwork is circa £50,000.

Local members were made aware of the process and the plans to have a public vote on the heritage wall during briefing sessions on the planning application. Members did not express at that time an interest in being involved in the design process, although it is recognised that this offer could have been followed up and confirmed later.

To identify and procure an artist, the Council invited local volunteers, including from the Crewe Cultural Forum, heritage and business groups, to support in the production of a brief for an artist. The procurement was advertised as an 'open call' via national and local artist and networks, including a website commonly used for public art projects (www.artjobs.org.uk). The brief was issued to those that expressed an interest and Cheshire East received tenders from 10 artists including four from local artists based in Cheshire East. The tenders were evaluated against specific scoring criteria relating to the designers' experience, skills, proposed approach, and cost. An additional weighting was given to local artists based in Cheshire East. The best tender overall was Orakel Workshop, who have vast experience in similar projects.

The designer followed the brief to research local heritage and associated imagery to create two alternative designs and to incorporate the recently developed Crewe brand, which has been the subject to extensive earlier consultation.

The successful designer has produced information boards and videos which explain the inspiration behind the designs, and the process for the final proposals, based on a number of factors including relevance to Crewe's heritage, aesthetic appearance, and consideration of the materials and production method. Further details on these designs and how they were put together can be found here:

[CREWE — Orakel Workshop](#)

Several other design ideas developed through the tender process have been discounted for use in the heritage wall, but it is the intention that some of these may be used elsewhere – for example, inside the new bus station concourse.

The original intention was to go to a public vote to select the preferred design as soon as possible, so that the materials can be ordered, and production commenced, mitigation anticipated price increases affecting aluminium production.

The perforated aluminium is to be provided by a Cheshire company and it can only be provided in one colour, and a light grey was selected as it provides the greatest contrast to help the images to stand out to best effect.

Going forward, the heritage wall work has been put on pause due to the response from members and the public on social media, we shall now revert to further discussions with key stakeholders including local members to review the design proposals and consider how they can be improved and whether other alternatives should be considered.

(4) Councillor P Redstone question to Cllr C Browne

Councillor P Redstone asked, on behalf of Odd Rode Parish Council, for assurance from officers that no herbicides would be used in the area by Cheshire East going forward as they left a 'revolting slurry' after use. Councillor C Browne advised that he would look into this issue and provide a written response.

Written Response

Cheshire East Highways currently use a herbicide (Glyphosate) to treat most weeds. Although Glyphosate is safe if used under manufacturer's instructions and by trained personnel, we are currently looking at other options. We have an annual programme of weed spraying covering all public roads, footways and paved areas. This year's programme started on Monday 1st August and will last for approximately 8 weeks, subject to weather conditions.

(5) Councillor L Anderson question to Cllr C Browne

Councillor L Anderson thanked Cheshire East for providing a warm welcome to Ukrainian refugees and stated that feedback on Cheshire East's response had been positive. Councillor L Anderson stated that some refugees had now been here for three months and wondered what will happen in the future, with some hosts having received letters asking if they would continue after six months. The Leader thanked the 277 sponsors supporting Ukrainian families and confirmed that there had been very few sponsor/refugee breakdowns but that, where that does happen, the Council would look to find alternative placements. In addition, the Leader confirmed that the Council has a responsibility for those who are made homeless and that this would be honoured. Councillor C Browne also thanked the hosts and advised that the guidance for what happens after

the initial six months continues to change on a frequent basis and, therefore, a written response would be provided.

Written Response

This initial guidance on the Homes for Ukraine scheme outlines the role of councils across England in supporting the scheme: [Homes for Ukraine: guidance for councils - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine-guidance-for-councils)

There may be some cases where the sponsor/guest relationship breaks down and the guest is homeless or at risk of homelessness. The Councils' statutory homelessness duties will apply in this instance.

Local housing authorities may be able to end a homelessness prevention or relief duty owed to a Ukrainian beneficiary by facilitating a rematch, provided the placement and accommodation are suitable and there is a reasonable prospect of it continuing to be available for at least six months.

Local housing authorities must continue to consider their statutory homelessness duties in full and take account of the individual circumstances of each household when assessing if the accommodation and match is suitable. DLUHC intends to provide more detail on this interaction shortly in an update to the Homelessness Code of Guidance, as well as consequences for intentional homelessness decisions.

Homelessness legislation in respect of local connection is unchanged. However, to support councils in determining which authority should provide assistance in cases where the household is yet to establish a local connection, the recommended general approach should be for the council where the household's sponsor is located to take the homelessness application.

If the household makes a homelessness application to a council other than the council where their sponsor is located, in line with the legislation the council must take the application and then consider if a local connection referral is appropriate.

(6) Cllr S Akers Smith question to Cllr C Browne/Cllr M Warren

Councillor S Akers Smith referred to the redevelopment of Congleton Leisure Centre where more asbestos was found in the building than had been expected, resulting in a cost and time delay amounting to more than £8.6m. Councillor S Akers Smith asked for an update on progress and completion of this leisure centre and information on how the potential cost increase would be funded.

Councillor S Akers Smith raised a further question regarding the redevelopment of Congleton Skate Park and stated that no funding was included for this in the leisure centre redevelopment, despite both being on the same site. Councillor S Akers Smith asked whether it would be possible to commit any funds from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to provide a new skate park rather than the refurbishment of what was believed to be an out of date facility. In addition,

Councillor S Akers Smith asked whether Cheshire East could help to deliver this project in partnership with ESAR and ANSA. In response, Councillor C Browne advised that this would usually be a question for the Chair of Environment and Communities and that a written response would be provided in his absence.

Written Response

Good progress is being made on the redevelopment of Congleton leisure centre, with construction expected to complete in December this year. The main building works are well advanced, and the attention has now moved to the internal works. There has been a delay to the original programme due to the presence of asbestos found during the ground works and also because of the need for the main contractor to source an alternative specialist pool sub-contractor after the original sub-contractor went into administration part way through the works. The higher than anticipated level of asbestos has resulted in an increase in the cost of the project. This has been funded via a virement from the Strategic Capital Reserve.

The Leisure Centre redevelopment project included budget provision to ensure the skate park was of an acceptable standard for the re-opening of the leisure centre. However, future aspirations for the skate park are in excess of the budget provision and so proposals for the refurbishment of the skate park will be taken forward as a separate Park Development project which will seek to identify ways in which the works can be funded.