

Chairman: Cllr Jim Devlin

27th October 2017

Mr Scott Logan
Commissioning Director People and Places
Basildon Borough Council
The Basildon Centre
St Martin's Square
Basildon
Essex SS14 1DL

Dear Mr Logan

Billericay Town Council would like to raise a complaint about the process followed at the 4th October Regeneration and Environment Committee meeting when a previously approved budget was removed from the long planned and much needed project to refresh the High Street in Billericay.

Significant amounts of time had been spent by Basildon Council officers and councillors to identify priority work that needed to be done within the allocated budget, including many hours liaising with various stakeholders in Essex County Council and utility companies. Orders were just about to be placed with equipment suppliers and contractors by officers with work scheduled for completion in a few weeks. Authorised under the previous administration and having recently been subject to inspection and subsequent reauthorisation by the new administration at the Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 27th July 2017, the Regeneration and Environment Committee nevertheless decided to remove the budget and divert it to another new project. The work schedule for the new project was based purely on suggestions by officers with constraints highlighted, best guess estimated costs and as yet no discussions with stakeholders. We understand that this was the first time this new project had been highlighted and it had not even been through the formal agreement process. Indeed, one of the most significant costs for that project - £170,000 - clearly stated that it was unknown if there was even any demand for the market kiosks that this would provide.

Whilst we have no comment to make on the benefits or otherwise of the Wickford project, the sole justification for removing the funding from the already authorised Billericay project was made by proposer Cllr Ferguson who stated that he believed there was "greater need in Wickford" whilst admitting that he hadn't looked in detail at the Billericay works.

Having listened to the audio transcript town councillors are very concerned at the lack of transparency during the meeting. Other than the comment above there was no detailed discussion as to the benefits, challenges and risks for each project, and no discussion as to why one project was more important or beneficial to the residents of the Borough overall.

We believe that the handling of the matter and the lack of transparency reflected very poorly on the Regeneration and Environment Committee. We would therefore request:

- that the way in which the conclusions of this meeting were arrived at are reviewed;
- for the supporting financial documentation to be provided which justified the removal of funding from a pre-authorized project to one which it would appear is still months from being completed, which has yet to go through a formal agreement process and where the justification for significant expenditure has still to be proven;
- for the rationale to be provided as to why the Wickford project was deemed to be of more importance to the Borough.

The Town Council looks forward to receiving a response at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Tonkiss
Town Clerk
Billericay Town Council