



CABINET

Tuesday 2 February 2021

FELIXSTOWE FORWARD TRANSITION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Felixstowe Forward (FF) was established by ESC and Felixstowe Town Council in April 2015 as an enabling and time limited initiative to deliver joined-up local economic and community development. It is now coming to the end of its second 3 year funding agreement. Both sponsoring partners agree that the closure of FF by the end of March 2021 would be detrimental in achieving the enabling objectives in economic and community development that the initiative was established to complete.
2. As a result, this paper proposes that the current funding agreement is extended until December 2021 resulting in budget growth of £83.5k (plus potential additional costs to cover redundancy and pension costs) for ESC. By this point Felixstowe Forward will have fully transitioned its current responsibilities in relation to business engagement/ development, tourism promotion/ brand management, community enabling, the Landguard Partnership and events management to existing and new bodies.
3. The extension will also bring FF's tenure in line with the Leiston Together place-based initiative and allow time for ESC to undertake a comprehensive review of its approach to place-based initiatives that will be implemented from the beginning of 2022.

Is the report Open or Exempt?	Open
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Wards Affected:	Eastern Felixstowe and Western Felixstowe
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Cabinet Member:	Councillor Craig Rivett Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Economic Development
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Supporting Officer:

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report sets out the proposed transitional arrangements for the Council's funding of Felixstowe Forward. The current funding agreement between ESC and Felixstowe Town Council is due to expire in March 2021, however both parties have agreed that in order to fully achieve its enabling role the place-based initiative should be extended until the end of December 2021. This is on the basis that the April to December period will be a transitional period where current responsibilities will be fully passed over to new and existing bodies and that ESC will be undertaking a comprehensive review of the Council's approach to place-based working that will report in the summer and be implemented from the beginning of 2022.
- 1.2 Felixstowe Forward was established in 2015 as a time-limited body to enable economic and community development within the town. This enabling function is the key feature that set it apart from its predecessor body, Felixstowe Futures.
- 1.3 The initiative was established as a partnership between ESC and FTC, the sponsoring bodies, with support and engagement from Suffolk County Council, the Port of Felixstowe, Community Action Suffolk and Felixstowe Chamber of Trade and Commerce. These bodies formed the Felixstowe Forward Sponsor Group – the partnership's governing board. An initial funding agreement between ESC and FTC for the partnership covered the period April 2015 – March 2018, followed by a subsequent agreement covering the April 2018 – March 2021 period.
- 1.4 To guide the work of Felixstowe Forward a Felixstowe Town Improvement plan was produced which focused on enabling activity in the following areas:
- Business / town centre engagement
 - Community enablement/ engagement
 - Resort promotion
 - Strategic support for wider, predominantly physical developments e.g. South Seafront public realm enhancements
 - Management and development of the Landguard Peninsula
- 1.5 In order to progress this work a small team was established, led by Helen Greengrass, Felixstowe Forward Change Director. The team comprises:
- Helen Greengrass – Change Director
 - Clare Baker – Change Co-ordinator
 - Stephen Rampley – Marketing & Events Officer*
 - Paul Grant – Landguard Project Officer*
 - Leonie Washington – Landguard Ranger*
- *These officers are funded via a separate Landguard Partnership budget (Stephen Rampley 50:50 Landguard and FF funded)
- 1.6 Felixstowe Forward is one of three place-based initiatives, alongside Lowestoft Rising and Leiston Together, which are directly funded by ESC and sit within a wider Community Partnership area. The table below provides a summary of these:

	Duration of current funding agreement	Funding partners and annual contribution
Felixstowe Forward	April 2018 – March 2021	ESC: £106K FTC: £20K
Leiston Together	Dec 2019 – Dec 2021	ESC: £36K LTC: £4K
Lowestoft Rising	April 2018 – March 2021	ESC: £15,000 Police, CCG and Suffolk CC: £15k each

2 ACHIEVEMENTS

2.1 During its six-year existence Felixstowe Forward has consistently delivered against its original enabling objectives. The following highlights the key achievements of the partnership since its inception in 2015.

2.2 **Deliver a place-based initiative for Felixstowe, actively involving the public, commercial and voluntary sectors**

- Established the Felixstowe Forward Sponsor Group and achieved Coastal Community Team status following the production/ submission of an Economic Plan to MHCLG
- Hosting annual engagement events to identify priorities, undertake community consultation and showcase achievements
- Secured £168k in external funding to support a range of capital and revenue projects supporting visitor economy and community development

2.3 **Better integrate local economic development, regeneration and community enabling in a more sustainable way**

- Developed and established strong links with businesses, community organisations and visitor attractions
- Supported the establishment of the Felixstowe Peninsula Community Partnership
- Achieved 'Rising Star' award in 2016 British High Street Awards
- Felixstowe Integrated Neighbourhood Team is evolving into an effective partnership
- Established Felixstowe as a dementia friendly town

2.4 **Achieved Business Improvement District (BID) status**

Following the undertaking of a feasibility study, town and seafront business engagement, production of detailed business plan, Felixstowe Forward and business partners secured a successful BID ballot in November 2020, despite a challenging business environment. This will result in a £600k+ investment by businesses over 5 years to deliver projects against 3 priorities – Local and Visitor Marketing and Promotion, Car Parking/Public Transport and Signage and Business Support. The BID will be operational from April 2021.

2.5 **Ongoing support to physical development schemes**

- Town Centre, South Seafront and North Felixstowe Garden Neighbourhood scheme
- Completion of Felixstowe Seafront Gardens project including delivery of an activity plan and final evaluation report (cited as exemplary by the HLF).
- Secured Green Flag and Green Heritage Awards and further established 'Friends of the Seafront Gardens'

3 INTERIM OPTIONS

3.1 ESC will be undertaking an extensive review of its approach to supporting and funding place-based initiatives during the first half of 2021. The review will take account of the other place-focused initiatives that have evolved during the current Felixstowe Forward funding agreement, such as the East Suffolk Strategic Plan, community partnerships, the East Suffolk Towns Revitalisation Initiative and Smart Towns programme, as well as engaging closely with town/ parish councils and other local bodies to ensure a collaborative approach to the review.

3.2 It will report back in the summer of 2021 with a set of recommendations for a new approach that will be in place from the beginning of 2022. In light of this and a consensus amongst partners that closing Felixstowe Forward in March 2021 would be detrimental to supporting and completing its key enabling objectives, three interim options are set out below:

Option 1

Extend the current funding arrangement for Felixstowe Forward until the end of December 2021

- Maintains a Felixstowe place-based initiative whilst ESC reviews its approach to such bodies
- Brings ESC's funding commitment timescale for Felixstowe Forward in line with Leiston Together
- Provides support for the BID during its establishment phase
- Provides adequate time to evolve Visit Felixstowe and transition to another host body

Option 2

Extend funding for the partnership until December 2021 and focus on transitioning the functions of Felixstowe Forward during this period

- As option 1 but with greater focus on transitioning the current responsibilities of Felixstowe Forward e.g. Visit Felixstowe, events management role and Landguard Partnership
- Provides support to the BID during its initial operational phase
- Maintains support for physical development projects whilst new bodies 'bed in' and ESC implements new place-based enabling support
- Provides additional time for the Community Partnership to become established
- Provides a clear signal that Felixstowe Forward will not continue beyond Dec 2021 as per its original remit

Option 3

Cease funding Felixstowe Forward at the end of March 2021 as per the current agreement

- Lack of support for establishment phase of the BID
- Lack of support for evolving Visit Felixstowe
- Doesn't provide adequate time for ESC to undertake for a full district-wide review of its approach to PBIs and implement the new model consistently across the district
- Will remove a wider support structure during the critical period of transition of the Landguard Partnership into a Trust, expected summer 2021.

3.3 **Preferred Option: Option 2 – Transition of Felixstowe Forward during April – December 2021**

Discussions between the partner bodies have concluded that bringing Felixstowe Forward to a close at the end of March 2021, as originally agreed, would not be beneficial in supporting and completing the key strands of its enabling work and would not allow sufficient time to implement a timely exit strategy. Instead, it is proposed that there is a transition period between April and December 2021 which will allow FF to fully complete its enabling objectives as originally set out. This will focus on the following of key areas and ensure that all current areas of activity are effectively transitioned to another organisation, partnership or structure:

3.4 Felixstowe BID

In November, businesses within the proposed BID boundary voted in favour of establishing a BID from April 2021. FF was instrumental in co-ordinating and enabling the businesses within this area to develop the BID proposal and organising the BID ballot process. Between now and April there is a need to formally establish the BID company, appoint directors, establish the executive board, agree governance and management arrangements, scope out the initial projects and appoint a BID Manager. Since the BID will be a brand new organisation, as of the beginning of April, it is felt that ongoing support from the Change Director during the April – Dec period, whilst the organisation is ‘finding its feet’ will give the BID the best possible start during its first 8 months.

3.5 Due to the economic impact of the Covid pandemic and similar to other towns, 2021 promises to be a challenging year economically for Felixstowe. The establishment of the BID and the support of the FF Change Director during 2021 will provide businesses in the town with every opportunity to develop and implement a recovery strategy. It will also provide capacity to embed other town-based initiatives such as the Towns Revitalisation Programme and Smart Towns.

3.6 Visit Felixstowe

There has been a long-held ambition that should there be a positive BID ballot result this would result in the Visit Felixstowe brand being hosted and managed by the BID. Since one of the BID’s key priorities will be visitor marketing and promotion it is natural that the brand would be hosted by this new body. To ensure a smooth transition, it is proposed that the Change Director and the Marketing & Events Officer continue to support the evolution of Visit Felixstowe during the April – December period.

3.7 Community Enabling activity

The FF Change Director has worked closely with the Communities Officer responsible for the Felixstowe Peninsular Community Partnership area to enable community-led activity to tackle local priorities. The Community Partnership launched with a workshop in November 2019 and, although it was paused at the height of the pandemic, is now meeting regularly virtually, and allocating funding to tackle the three priorities agreed at the workshop. This Community Enabling role has been focussed on the Covid-19 response over recent months and supporting the main organisations in the town as they in turn support the most vulnerable in the community to access food, prescriptions and support with isolation/loneliness, mental ill health and financial hardship. Continuing FF to December 2021 would enable this work to be further strengthened as the Community Partnership evolves.

3.8 Landguard Partnership

The Landguard Partnership has recently undergone a major governance review which has resulted in the recommendation and agreement that the Landguard Community Trust be established to manage, develop, and enhance the Landguard Peninsula. It is anticipated that the trust will be operational during the summer of 2021 and as a result it is proposed that the Change Director continues to provide support to the Landguard Project Officer during this critical time to ensure a smooth and successful transition to the new Trust body.

3.9 Events Management

ESC is considering the adoption of a new online events management application system which would significantly reduce officer time required to manage these applications and make the process more efficient for the applicants. The intention is to have the new system in place for the beginning of the new tourism season in April 2021. If adopted this will result in a review of current ESC staffing associated with events management. Felixstowe hosts a large proportion of the events which take place on ESC owned land and this proposal represents a significant change, it is therefore proposed that the Change Director oversees the implementation and initial operation of this new system and provides support to the events management officers.

4 HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO THE EAST SUFFOLK STRATEGIC PLAN?

4.1 Felixstowe Forward's remit has been to enable economic and community development within the town and as such directly contributes to two of the five strategic priorities of the Strategic Plan – Growing our Economy and Enabling Our Communities. The activities of Felixstowe Forward over the last 6 years have also directly contribute to the specific priorities within these two themes including:

- Attract and stimulate inward investment
- Maximise and grow the USPs of east Suffolk
- Business partnerships
- Support and deliver infrastructure
- Community partnerships
- Maximise health, well-being and safety
- Community pride

5 FINANCIAL AND GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The extension of the current funding agreement until the end of December 2021 will mean that ESC will have to provide additional funding of £83,500. This represents growth to the current budget and it has been agreed that should the extension be approved by Cabinet this funding will come from the New Homes Bonus budget which has been the source of funding for the Felixstowe Forward partnership since its inception. This will be matched by Felixstowe Town Council on a pro-rata basis in line with the current funding agreement i.e. 75% of their annual allocation which is £15,000.

5.2 In addition, there will potentially be redundancy costs totalling £35.6k should the current staff not be redeployed and capitalised pension costs of £15,726 for one individual. Again, it is proposed that these costs are met by the New Homes Bonus budget.

5.3 The governance of Felixstowe Forward will continue through the Sponsor Group which comprises both funding partners as well as other bodies supporting the delivery of the partnership's objectives such as Felixstowe Chamber, Community Action Suffolk, Suffolk County Council and the Port of Felixstowe.

6 OTHER KEY ISSUES

6.1 This report has been prepared having taken into account the results of an Equality Impact Assessment. The assessment identified that Felixstowe Forward's activities are positive in terms age and disability and neutral for the protected characteristic groups.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 This proposal was developed in consultation with all partners in the Felixstowe Forward initiative.

8 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

8.1 See above for other options considered.

9 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

9.1 It is recommended that the ESC’s funding of Felixstowe Forward is extended until the end of December 2021 to facilitate the transition of its current responsibilities in the areas of business engagement, events management, tourism promotion, community development and health and wellbeing. This additional nine months will allow the partnership to have achieve all of its objectives and transition ongoing responsibilities to new and existing bodies. As set out above FF has been highly successful in achieving its enabling functions across wide areas of economic and community development.

<p>RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>That the extension of the current funding agreement for Felixstowe Forward until the end of December 2021 at a cost of £134.8k be approved.</p>
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APPENDICES	
Appendix A	Transition of responsibilities flow chart

BACKGROUND PAPERS – None
