

Council

11 December 2024

Leader's announcements

I know colleagues will join me in welcoming Councillor Fran Oborksi MBE to this meeting of full Council, so soon after undergoing life-changing surgery. Fran's indomitable spirit and dedication to her role as a councillor have shone through, even to the extent of joining a meeting of Cabinet last month from her hospital bed. We all wish Fran well for the future as she adjusts to her changed circumstances.

Major Government policy announcements are due in the remaining few days before Christmas. The Government's decisions following the consultation on the national planning policy framework are expected this week, and will be followed at some point in the New Year by the Planning and Infrastructure Bill. We have already seen a "working paper" about options for a national scheme of delegation, that would reduce the number of applications that go before councillors in planning committees.

Next week, we are expecting the devolution white paper followed by the provisional local government settlement for 2025-26. There has been widespread speculation in the media about funding for district councils, mayoral combined authorities and potential local government reorganisation. It is important that we wait for and respond to whatever the Government actually announces. I am sure officers will brief members on the key points when documents have been issued.

Despite any uncertainty caused by Government policy decisions, we continue to make good progress with day-to-day services and our major regeneration and capital projects which come to fruition during 2025. The Old Court (creative hub) is nearing completion and undergoing snagging with handover scheduled for mid-January. Colleagues will be looking forward to the official opening on 30 January which will be performed by the Chairman. Marketing of space in the building continues apace.

The Castle Road temporary accommodation scheme is also proceeding well although there have been some impacts from recent spells of poor weather. Work in the last month has continued on finalising the roof, including solar panel installations, connecting the site to the mains electricity and plaster boarding all floors.

Contractors have been appointed for the Brinton Park HLF Project and works are due to start as early as possible in 2025. Work will begin on the ornamental pool, entrance gates and upgrade to pathways. Building works at the Sons of Rest building are programmed at the end of the project. HLF have approved the recruitment of a Community Engagement Officer and have sent a loud and clear message that we should continue to progress with this project. Full project scheduled to complete in twelve to eighteen months.

The enabling works at the Piano Building were completed on 10 December with the main works contract starting at the beginning of January, with programmed practical completion in July 2025. Marketing efforts are under way to secure tenants for the food and beverage and leisure uses on the ground floor as well as the office space on higher floors.

## **Agenda Item No. 7**

Construction of the urban park that links Worcester Street with the Bromsgrove Street car park commenced at the end of September with current practical completion programmed for August.

These projects together represent the most significant investment in regeneration and infrastructure that this Council has ever delivered at one time. Despite the glitches that can often occur along the way with capital projects, the Council can remain proud of all that is being achieved as it will benefit Kidderminster and the wider district for a long time to come.

Yesterday, the LGA's peer challenge review team returned to the Council to follow up the review that they undertook in March. I am grateful to members who made time available to be interviewed by the team and were able to share their perspective on progress over recent months. We expect to receive a letter summarising the review team's reflections in January and it will be shared with all councillors before it is published.

Finally, it remains for me, on behalf of Council, to extend thanks to all staff for their hard work during 2024, and especially to those who will be working over the Christmas and New Year period. I would also like to wish all members of Council and staff a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.