

WEST DEVON INVEST TO EARN COMMITTEE



West Devon
Borough
Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Invest to Earn Committee** held on **Tuesday, 17th December, 2019** at **3.30 pm** at the **Meeting Room 3 - Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Edmonds
Vice Chairman

Cllr Samuel

Cllr Cheadle

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Crozier
Cllr Pearce

Cllr Mott
Cllr Sellis

Officers:

Section 151 Officer
Strategic Finance Lead
Strategic Director – Place & Enterprise
Monitoring Officer
HOP Lead – Finance
Specialist – Democratic Services

9. **Declarations of Interest**
IE.9/19
Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting but none was made.
10. **Confirmation of Minutes**
IE.10/19
The minutes of the meetings held on 3 September and 1 October 2019 were approved as a correct record.

11. **Exclusion of Public and Press**

IE.11/19

RESOLVED

That in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business as the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Act is involved.

12. **Business Case for Investment in Solar Farm**

IE.12/19

Members were presented with an exempt report that sought approval of investment in a solar farm to be 50% owned by the Council, the commercial return for which would be from energy generated and sold to the national grid.

The Director of Place and Enterprise explained that the proposal was being re-presented to the Committee, in view of material changes that had arisen as a result of due diligence work undertaken. He and the s151 Officer responded to questions of clarity.

Points raised included the following:

- Updated energy prices had been considered and the market tested
- The proposal would have planning permission for 40 years
- There would be options at both the 20 year and 30 year point to address degradation
- Sensitivity analysis had been done and graphs included in the exempt Committee report

Questions included the following:

- Did the business case include an assumption built in that allowed for the impact on price from increased availability of solar power? In response, officers advised that price projections took this into account.
- Had the environmental impact of building the solar farm been taken into account? In response, Members were advised that whilst there was an impact from the construction, a landscape was then created by way of boundary treatment and the biodiversity system underneath the panels
- Should the Council impose the development on another area? In response, the officers confirmed that planning permission had already been granted, and the development of renewable energy aligned with national policy

Members discussed the following:

- How much the Council should charge itself for electricity
- Future energy prices being the biggest risk
- The detail of the loan arrangements
- The impact of a neighbouring power station
- Disposal costs at the end of the project
- How the Council would know that the energy was green
- Whether the return justified the borrowing

At the conclusion of this discussion, one Member summed up by stating that whilst the longer term projections were not such a concern, he still did have some concerns about the level of spend required to ensure due diligence. The Director of Place and Enterprise accepted that the risk was recognised, and set out the mitigation and likely spend at that point.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the Invest to Earn Committee **RECOMMENDS** to the Head of Paid Service and Section 151 Officer approval of the investment to purchase 50% of shares in a solar farm SPV and subsequent development of 14MW capacity solar farm in accordance with the business case contained in the exempt appendices and the Terms of Reference of the Invest to Earn Committee; and
2. That, if any of the figures materially change on the completion of the full financial, legal and technical due diligence, then a further report was to be brought back to the Invest to Earn Committee prior to final sign-off of the investment.

The Meeting concluded at 5.00 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
