

CABINET

Monday, 24 February 2014

Present: Councillor P Davies (Chair)

Councillors G Davies B Kenny
P Hackett AR McLachlan
AER Jones H Smith
C Jones T Smith

Apologies Councillors C Meaden

154 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members of the Cabinet were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary or non pecuniary interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Councillor Phil Davies declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item by virtue of him being a Director of the Wirral Chamber of Commerce and left the room during its consideration.

Councillor Adrian Jones declared a prejudicial interest in this item by virtue of a personal acquaintance and also left the room during its consideration.

The Vice-Chair, Councillor Ann McLachlan, in the Chair

155 FORMER PACIFIC ROAD ARTS CENTRE AND TAYLOR STREET TRANSPORT MUSEUM AND TRAMWAY, BIRKENHEAD

Further to minute 371 (29 March 2012), the Assistant Chief Executive/Head of Universal and Infrastructure Services reported upon changes in circumstances since the original decision to dispose of the Pacific Road Arts Centre and the Taylor Street Transport Museum and Tramway in Birkenhead. He referred to continuing interest from third parties and to additional expressions of interest since March 2012, which were set out in appendices to his report.

He indicated that the assets did not form part of the Council's future requirements for performance spaces and it was assumed that annual revenue savings were to be sought from any future treatment of the assets. At the same time the Council was willing to consider alternative approaches to service delivery for the Museum and Tramway. Pacific Road was no longer a performance venue and the Council now had to concentrate activities at the Floral Pavilion to support its business plan.

However, new proposals had emerged for both Pacific Road and the Transport Museum, in particular related to community management of the transport museum and tramway, with ownership of the tramway remaining in Council ownership, and the separate conversion of the Pacific Road building. Peel Holdings – with the Wirral Street Car Project – had also brought forward

an initial concept for the integration of the tramway into the Wirral Waters development and a potential wider transport network.

In view of the opportunity that had arisen to consider afresh options for the future of the assets, not just to contribute to savings requirements but also in terms of their fit with the wider regeneration of the area. Officers were of the view that the Council should now negotiate terms for a transfer of the transport museum to the existing volunteer groups under the banner of the Merseyside Tramway Preservation Society (MTPS); negotiate terms for a lease of the Pacific Road building to the Wirral Chamber for its conversion to enterprise and employment space, and to discuss with Peel Holdings the basis on which its Wirral Street Car Project could be developed, with the Tramway remaining in council ownership. He outlined the proposed terms of a transfer and indicated that such an approach would deliver revenue savings for the Council and would maintain and develop the existing heritage attraction of the Transport Museum and Tramway through a different means of service delivery with greater volunteer control. The proposal would also strengthen economic and business activity and contribute to the wider regeneration of the area and in particular support the development of the early phases of Wirral Waters.

In response to a question from the Vice-Chair as to whether officers had been in contact with those groups who had previously expressed an interest, the Assistant Chief Executive indicated that they had been informed of the Council's changed circumstances and had been given an opportunity to comment on the changed proposals. He indicated that there had been some disappointment that bids had not been taken forward. However, in order to provide transparency with regard to the Council's position, he commented that the previously restricted appendices to his report were now open documents and had been published with the agenda papers.

In relation to some concerns that had previously been expressed with regard to the loss of a performance venue at Pacific Road, a Member highlighted the excellent facilities that were now available at the Floral Pavilion in New Brighton.

Resolved –

- (1) That all parties that have bid for, or shown an expression of interest in, any of the assets be thanked for their interest.**
- (2) That the Council enter into an Agreement for Lease with The Chamber to facilitate the drawdown of funding for the conversion of the Pacific Road building to a managed business centre, on completion of which a 25 year contracted-out lease will be granted at a peppercorn. The agreement will allow access by the Council and the Merseyside Tramway Preservation Society to the tramline inside the building, and the sub-station, which powers the tramway.**
- (3) That an appropriate means of transferring responsibility for operating the Taylor Street Museum and Tramway to the Merseyside Tramway Preservation Society be agreed and documented.**